WHAT SUPERVISORS SHOULD CONSIDER WHEN EVALUATING AN EMPLOYEE’S REQUEST TO WORK REMOTELY

Maintaining a positive work environment has become a challenge in the age of Covid-19. Disagreements between supervisors and employees about the success of remote work has become an especially challenging topic. An employee may believe they are effective when working from home, while their supervisor may disagree. When supervisors are discussing the efficacy of remote work with their employees, we recommend reviewing the following discussion points to evaluate the ability to work remotely. If the request to work at home is approved, performance expectations need to be clarified as well.

When Considering the Request to Work Remotely

1) Review the employee’s job duties with the employee to identify what tasks can or cannot be accomplished remotely.

2) Discuss the options for addressing duties not easily accomplished remotely.
   - Let the employee suggest methods for accomplishing the task. Listen carefully to their ideas.
   - Be open-minded about alternate approaches. Remember, innovation is often spurred by difficult circumstances.

3) If some infrequently performed tasks cannot be performed remotely, discuss options for addressing these tasks. Options may include a schedule that includes both remote and on-site time; temporary reallocation of the task, if reassignment does not create a hardship for others; and postponement or elimination, if possible, of non-critical tasks.

WHAT EMPLOYEES SHOULD CONSIDER WHEN MAKING A REQUEST TO WORK REMOTELY

A lot of things have changed over the past five months. The disruption of familiar life patterns coupled with new demands, like the need to home school your children or set up a temporary workstation at what used to be your dining room table, has made everything more difficult. Job flexibility has become more important to you. You think that working remotely on a regular basis could be your best option.

Your experience during the last several months has led you to believe that you can be just as effective when working from home as when you were coming to your traditional workplace. However, your supervisor may disagree with that assessment.

When employees are discussing the wisdom of remote work with their supervisors, we recommend reviewing the following issues to demonstrate your ability to work remotely. If the request to work at home is approved, make sure that you completely understand the performance expectations of your manager before you make the change.

1) Approach your supervisor with a plan that clearly demonstrates how you will accomplish your goals while maintaining the work standards necessary to be successful. If you have had prior performance related issues, you will probably not be viewed as a good candidate for remote work. Review all your job duties to identify what tasks can or cannot be accomplished remotely. Be honest in your assessment. You cannot just walk into your supervisor’s office and declare, “I want to work remotely” without a well thought out plan.
4) Consider how other employees could be affected by the remote work of the employee. Ask the employee what their thoughts are on this issue and if they have suggestions on how to mitigate any negative potential impact.

5) Consider the impact on the “customer” of your organization. This could mean students, faculty, or staff in other departments. While it is possible to conduct tasks, like counseling, via telephone or Teams, the customer may desire to meet face-to-face. Visiting offices only to find locked doors with “working remotely” signs taped to them can create a negative impression. This consideration may have to be conveyed to employees as a condition for providing an expected level (standard) of service to customers.

Tip: Negotiate in good faith. While it is important to make sure that tasks are performed and organizational goals are met, workplace relationships need to be maintained as well. Everyone is anxious and under unusual stress. A good faith effort on your part will go a long way toward building and maintaining a positive work environment.

Here is the bottom line: The supervisor and the employee must be able find a way for the employee to accomplish all their essential job duties for a remote work schedule to be approved.

Courses Online: OPD continues to offer courses online to maximize participation virtually vs. in-person. All courses are available on the Training Calendar through December.

LEAD 2 will conclude at the end of 2020 and OPD will offer several new learning tracks in 2021. Two core LEAD 2 are not offered online: Communication Skills for Managers and Cross-Cultural Communications. Two LEAD 2 elective courses can be substituted for these two courses to achieve LEAD 2 completion. Instructions below:

Please email us with 1) your training record and, 2) your LEAD 2 course substitutions plan for consideration. OPD will reply and approve your plan or clarify the status of your LEAD 2 progress. Notify OPD again once you are complete.

2) Make sure that you are ready to discuss the options for addressing duties not easily accomplished remotely.

- Have specific suggestions for accomplishing the tasks. Listen carefully to your supervisor's concerns. Do not be dismissive of their concerns. Ask questions like: What is it about my idea that concerns you? Can you suggest a modification to my idea that would make it more acceptable to you? What would it take to convince you that this could work?

- Be open-minded about altering your initial approach. Remember, your supervisor must be concerned about more than just meeting your personal needs or desires.

3) If some infrequently performed tasks cannot be performed remotely, offer options for addressing these tasks. Options may include a schedule that includes both remote and on-site time; temporary reassignment of the task, if reassignment does not create a hardship for others; and postponement or elimination, if possible, of non-critical tasks.

4) Consider the impact of your request on co-workers, students, or other internal and external customers. While it is possible to conduct your duties remotely, your manager may still require some on campus work to provide an expected level of service to your customers or to avoid creating a hardship on a co-worker. You will also need to be flexible about issues like office coverage during times of leave, team meetings or other circumstances that are not representative of a “typical day.”

Tip: Negotiate in good faith. You need to clearly demonstrate that you can perform your full job and help make sure that the organizational goals are met without negatively impacting others. You share the burden of maintaining workplace relationships. Your supervisor is under unusual stress and organizational pressure. Be reasonable and realistic. Do not take an all or nothing approach to the situation. Sometimes change needs to take place gradually for it to be fully accepted.