



BACK-TO-SCHOOL

7 Ways Employers Can Help Parents Juggling Working From Home and Online School

The demands on working employees to both manage their jobs and be their child's only resource to help navigate the technical difficulties and nuances of remote learning are a real and present strain on employees.

Employers can establish tangible, practical ways to offer support to employees, while still managing performance expectations, employee engagement and healthy retention rates. While everyone is trying their best to navigate the unprecedented waters created by COVID-19, employers can set themselves apart from their competitors and attract and hold onto valuable talent by highlighting flexibility and support to employees, when it is needed most.

Here are our suggestions on how you can better assist employees and ultimately keep your company's operations running efficiently and have a happier, engaged workforce:

- 1. Offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).** An EAP gives employees access to expert, confidential assistance for substance abuse issues, relationship troubles, financial problems, and mental health conditions. These services are offered through an outside provider that connects employees with the appropriate resources and professionals.
- 2. Construct and communicate expectations for remote work.** Instead of keeping a close eye on when an employee is completing their work, focus more on if their work is being completed and still meeting relevant timeframes and deadlines. While non-exempt employees are still required to track their time worked, consider only requiring employees to work during specific "core hours" of the day to ensure accessibility, communication and availability for meetings and allow employees to structure the remainder of their workday around assisting their child with their remote learning, troubleshooting and regular breaks like meal periods.
- 3. Establish clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), if you do not already have them in place.** While flexibility is paramount for employees working and juggling remote learning management, an employee's performance can still be held to the applicable standards. If the company has not established metrics or tangible goals for how an employee's success is measured, it is difficult to know (and prove) when a remote employee is under-performing. Outlining clear performance expectations helps employees know exactly how their work is measured and evaluated, while providing a tangible benchmark to review if an employee's performance is dipping below these standards.
- 4. Provide outlets for employee connection and engagement.** If your company had routine happy hours or lunch and learns to carve out time for employees to build relationships when the offices were open, consider a virtual alternative (i.e., optional Wednesday Lunch and Learns on Zoom or Virtual Happy Hour on Fridays, where employees can share their ingredients and steps for their favorite drink, food or snack). Specific to working parents, a Slack channel, Microsoft Teams or Google Hangout are great options for employees to meet up on their lunches or breaks to discuss the tips and tricks they are learning to manage remote learning for their kids.
- 5. Encourage PTO usage.** While employees may prefer to stockpile PTO to use later on, it is vital to encourage employees to step away, focus on remote learning or enjoy downtime with their family and come back to work with a clearer head space. Additionally, taking a PTO day on the first remote school day or during the return from an extended break (Thanksgiving or breaks between semesters) may be a better idea than trying to navigate work and remote learning expectations, based on the employee's preferences.

6. **Streamline and minimize meetings.** Frequent interruptions from children needing assistance with remote learning can make attendance in multiple Zoom meetings a big challenge, so consider streamlining meetings by sending brief agenda ahead of the meeting and dive right into the “meat and potatoes” of the meeting subject matter, for ultimate time-management and efficiency. If possible, try to keep meetings to 30 minutes or less for employees to plan around or continue the meeting online through a chat stream. Zoom or meeting fatigue is likely to disengage employees; try to mix up meeting mediums and formats to avoid stagnation.

7. **Gather and implement employee feedback.** During routine check-ins, managers can make a big impact by simply asking an employee how they are doing and how their week is going. Taking the time to honestly ask how things are going can make employees feel heard and provides opportunity for problem solving, if the employee is working through difficulties with their time management or workload. Managers can also ask the same key questions to passively gather data and trends on employee engagement, without sending out daily or weekly surveys for employees to complete. For example, if all managers asked, “How can I or the company better support you during this time?”, managers can aggregate this data to see what is going well, what is not and other employee trends.

Lastly, keep in mind that not all ideas or changes the company implements may be a success. Be flexible and re-evaluate the changing needs of the company and employees as we continue to navigate through the constantly changing, post-COVID world.

About

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