Toolkit:

Sustaining a workplace during the COVID-19 outbreak

Navigating the business environment in the new era of the COVID-19 pandemic seems overwhelming. Maintaining a composed and pragmatic outlook and following some basic guidelines will be a road map to organizational success in difficult times.

There are many considerations that must be taken into account, such as:

- Recognizing the importance of work from home policies, including clear communication
- Implementing telework options for non-exempt employees
- Understanding the psychological toll on a largely remote workforce
- Managing employee leave and staying compliant with new laws.
- Utilizing the CARES Act to deal with your organization's economic hardships.
- Using other free tools available right now to help your organization through this.

The following tips, insights and items can help manage your workplace through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The value of work from home policies

A recent study regarding managing a workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that 90 percent of employers surveyed believe it is crucial to provide employees with a remote and flexible work option. As more companies implement work-from-home policies do not overlook the comfort level of employees who are used to an office setting. Microsoft recently reported that 81 percent of its workforce is now working from home due to the novel coronavirus outbreak. Some simple tips to ease their workplace shift include:

Communicate early & often

Communication tools bring immediacy. While it's not like peering over a cubicle wall, a level of inter-office camaraderie can be established with communication tools. Such tools allow employees working remotely to share pictures or videos of their new "in-home" assistants – pets, children and even plants.

Establish (or deploy) clear telework policies.

What if your workforce is largely hourly? In many cases those employees must be on site. Yet there is a contingent of non-exempt hourly employees — those workers entitled to overtime pay at time and one-half the regular rate of pay for all hours worked over 40 hours in a workweek — who can utilize a telework option. Clearly, establishing the hours worked for a non-exempt employee and properly recording and tracking that time and paying the employee for time worked are critical.

Teleworking options for non-exempt employees

Employers wanting to expand teleworking options for their non-exempt employees as the COVID-19 crisis deepens should consider ways to minimize their risks under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

01 Implementing a time and attendance tracking system that can be accessed remotely should be a high priority for employers. FLSA dictates that employers are required to maintain certain records for each non-exempt worker. More and more workers "clock in" or "clock out" by logging in to a software program on an employer-provided computer or via a mobile app. If the employer already utilizes such a software program, it should be relatively simple to determine whether the program can be accessed remotely, which can be used by a remote worker. In this era of COVID-19 offering remote time tracking keeps all eligible employees and the public as a whole safer and healthier.

02 One question that could arise among employers is, "How will I know whether these employees are really working?" In reality, since supervisors are rarely hovering over an employee's shoulder through the day, it's not abundantly clear how much work they are getting done in the office, either. Re-evaluating a performance management system goes a long way in measuring workers' efficiency. The Society for Human Resource Management suggests evaluating what the job entails and how performance is measured while physically present, and then determining "whether physical presence is necessary for measuring/evaluating job performance."

03 Written policies will clearly communicate to teleworking employees that working off the clock and under-reporting or over-reporting hours worked is prohibited. The policy also should define an overtime policy that prohibits working over 40 hours without advance written authorization.

Assessing employee's mental health

The psychological toll on a workforce cannot be overlooked. The CDC points out that everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How business leaders and managers respond to the outbreak can depend on an employee's background, the things that make them different from co-workers and even the industry in which they work.

Businesses also must juggle multiple legal and operational functions. Some employers are also focusing on mental health resources and providing support to help employees cope.
To help ease employees' anxiety, HR can act as a transparent hub of information and support for employees.

With employees facing unprecedented change and workplace insecurities, HR can aid bridging the uncertain future by helping the organization pull together and support each other like never before.

"By being more transparent and discussing worst-case scenarios, managers cannot only reduce stress but also other dysfunctional outcomes, like increased gossip and decreased commitment, which often occurs when employees are faced with ambiguous situations," according to a blog post on Psychology Today. "Information sharing is often seen as an indicator of trust, so managers who are more open are also likely to be seen as more credible and trustworthy."

As employers do what they can to keep employee morale high, employees can take steps to lift their own spirits, such as:

Try to replicate your office workspace.
A dual-screen setting or bringing home your favorite plant or coffee cup can help.

Dress for work.
How we dress for work and our in-home attire likely varies widely. It's easy to slip into sweat pants and a sweatshirt at home. Instead, treat work from home like a casual Friday by wearing jeans and a collared shirt and call it casual home day.

Leave Management

Workforce.com employment-law blogger Jon Hyman and Chief Revenue Officer Paul Smith co-hosted a webinar addressing the coronavirus pandemic and its effects on the workforce. An on-demand presentation of the webinar is available. A portion of the webinar was dedicated to leave-management policies during the coronavirus outbreak and the new laws that are impacting the space.

Congressional passage of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act offers fresh guidance for leave management and provides a measure of relief to employees in need of leave. The Act amends the definition of "employee" to anyone who has been employed by an employer for at least 30 days. The Act also changes the definition of "employer" from "50 or more employees" to "fewer than 500 employees."

Up to 80 hours of paid sick leave is provided by the FFRCA for full-time employees (prorated for part-time employees) who are unable to work or telework because:

- The employee is quarantined or self-isolating because of coronavirus concerns.
- The employee is experiencing symptoms of coronavirus and seeking a medical diagnosis.
- The employee is caring for an individual who is quarantined or self-isolating because of coronavirus concerns.
- The employee is caring for a child whose school or place of care has been closed, or the care provider is unavailable due to coronavirus precautions

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offered health-related leave-management guidelines for employers.

Employees should stay home if they have a fever and cough. Also, get immediate care for severe respiratory distress.

Encourage employees to utilize remote work options.

Wellness programs can provide employees with basic hygiene and disease prevention techniques.

The CDC also stated that employers should ease up on requiring a doctor's note. "Do not require a health care provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as health care provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way," the CDC advised.

CARES Act

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act, includes funding and other measures to provide financial relief to businesses, individuals and families.
The Act aids businesses and individuals in addressing the economic hardships caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Provisions for businesses include:

- Small business loans.
- Delay payment of employer payroll taxes.
- An employee retention credit.

Provisions for individuals include:

- Recovery rebates.
- Unemployment insurance expansion.
- Retirement plan relief.

COVID-19 has changed how businesses operate. We recognize that organizations need extra help navigating these new challenges. So we're offering our GPS clock-in tool and chat app for free to new sign-ups over the coming months.

Our GPS clock-in tool allows your employees to clock in and out from their personal mobile device and provides you with their GPS location that provides confidence knowing where your staff is while eliminating the need to have employees touching and sharing clock-in screens.

The Workforce.com chat app lets you send messages to any employee at any time. This real-time communication among teams encourages questions so misinformation is kept to a minimum and allows problems to be solved faster regardless of where people are.

Sign up today and our Workforce Success team will provide a personal, online walk-through of our platform to help you get started. It can be fully deployed in 1-2 days.