

One Lasting Effect Covid-19 Will Have On Business

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I am sure the national response to Covid-19 will have many lasting effects on every industry. These will include how businesses operate, emergency preparedness, contingency plans, etc. We can guess that employee basics such as compensation and benefits will address stay-at-home orders or other reactions to similar emergency situations. Many companies may more clearly articulate the implied contract that is a part of every employment relationship. (How secure is my job? What happens with a furlough or layoff? Where do I stand in relation to callback or rehire lists? Is job performance a factor in either the furlough or callback? How do benefits continue during this time? Are there some jobs in my company that are “essential” and others that are not?)

Predicting the future

I am not a prophet, but every HR professional should see these issues and more waiting to be addressed when businesses return to a more normal footing. If I were to ask every reader to compile a list of the top 5 changes that they believe will occur in organizations as a result of our pandemic response, there is 1 item that I think would be on everyone's list.

What is that item? Work-from-home will become much more common and accepted. The pandemic response will accelerate this in most every industry. Historically, employees were onsite and a strong case had to be made for employee's to work at home. The law of inertia is a powerful force since it requires more energy to change than to remain the same.

Overcoming the law of inertia

With the pandemic response, the status quo was reversed: Employees were required to stay at home. With “at home” being the given, employers began asking just how much of the employee's job could be accomplished from home.

Many companies embraced technology that they had previously ignored as not applying to them . This included video conferencing, remote data access, communication, etc.

I am sure that many organizations that had never before considered work-from-home as a possibility were forced to address how these employees could be supervised and how productivity can be monitored. The obvious result is going to be that many employees like working from home, and many employers will see that many of its positions can be satisfactorily accomplished this way. For many organizations, having many support or administrative positions done from home frees up valuable real estate that can be better used in providing front-line sales or service to the customer.

Healthcare and work-at-home

My posts are primarily aimed at the healthcare industry which delivers a “hands on” service. As one hospital CEO used to tell his employees, “ we don’t deliver one bit of service, fulfill one bit of our mission, or make one dollar until someone physically interacts with the patient”. While this is true and generally requires a physical presence, there are many support, administrative, and even clinical positions that can be done from home .

One large Rheumatology clinic that I work with now has all the physicians practicing telemedicine from their homes. The schedulers and billing department, HR function and other administrative support staff are now offsite. The only staff still onsite are two RNs in the Infusion Department and one Receptionist. Will this permanently alter the organization? Only time will tell but it is showing in real time how much can actually be accomplished offsite.

Which positions in your organization could realistically be done from home? Medical transcription and coders have worked from home at many organizations for years. How about your schedulers? Marketing/Public Relations? HR Recruiters? What Physicians can practice tele-medicine? Can Radiology/Lab diagnostic results be determined on-line? If a position deals primarily with electronic records or telephone interactions, is there a reason that it must be done onsite?

Some Considerations

Every HR department should be prepared to address work-at-home issues. There will be increased demand from many of your employee groups to accommodate this. While this list is not all-inclusive, at a minimum you should be prepared to address the following;

- How is working time monitored/enforced?
- Do compensation policies support work-at-home? Is the position salaried/hourly?
- Many employees find work-at-home desirable because of children at home. How does the organization deal with work and childcare or other home duties?
- How is supervision maintained and what does this look like?
- How are these employees included in formal communication lines?
- When are these employees required to be on-site? Is advance notice required or does the organization maintain the right to call them in at anytime?
- Are the work hours flexible or structured?
- How is confidentiality of information maintained? Does the employee have hard copies of confidential information? How is security maintained?
- How is productivity monitored or enforced?

Most organizations have some positions that are work-at-home. These are often the “no-brainer” exempt positions so we have taken a laissez-faire approach. With this becoming more common, HR should anticipate the future by insuring that they have a structure in place to support this work alternative.

A “high-performance” HR department should always choose to be proactive rather than reactive! Why not be the in-house expert in work-from-home opportunities in healthcare? Why not have the structure , policies and procedures developed BEFORE someone else in the C-Suite asks for it?