Rise of the Remote Worker

Leading a Distributed Workforce
in a Time of Change

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The Future of Work

The shift into remote work has highlighted the critical nature of embracing an online workforce. Thankfully, the digital age has already driven many businesses to set structures in place to support this change.

Remote work has altered nearly every aspect of business, and both employers and their workforces have been redefining how and where work gets done. Today, high-performing organizations operate more like empowered networks than traditional corporate hierarchies. And through all of this change, a new class of employee has emerged: the remote worker.

According to the Wall Street Journal, two-thirds of companies were allowing employees to work at home occasionally, and 38% allow some workers to do so regularly. Now, these rates are suddenly and drastically increasing and businesses are likely to experience more permanent shifts to remote work.

Once a company makes the decision to embrace remote work, they immediately break down the barriers to hiring talent within their geographic vicinity. Imagine if every time you hired, you hired the absolute best person for the role, regardless of where they were located. You would be able to recruit the best of the best.

Expanding into other geographies diversifies thoughts and opinions—and diversity is a hallmark of the most innovative and successful companies.

While some are still debating the merits, we say remote work is not only needed right now, but is critical to sustained success. As such, you need a strategy. The following ebook will offer an analysis of the trends driving the need for remote work, as well as provide you with practical tips to successfully manage a remote team.

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Learn the trends that are responsible for the remote work phenomenon.

Why You Need a Remote Work Policy

Remote work helps companies respond to sudden industry changes.

Remote work has had a profound effect on workplaces around the world, with many companies switching to distributed work. Recent advances in online collaboration, project management software, and video communication have helped many businesses make the transition to remote work and deliver work consistently and seamlessly to clients.

As more and more people enter the world of remote work, flexible work arrangements will become a necessity for businesses, rather than a perk. Managing remote workers requires consistent, documented policies to set expectations and guidelines for managers and workers alike.

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"From the outside, it's a thrilling way to work. You could have a job with a remote company that allows you to work from anywhere in the world ... It's all in a day's work (and life) for digital nomads. With a strong Internet connection, a laptop, and not much more, digital nomads can work from literally every corner of the globe without missing a deadline."

JENNIFER PARRIS
Contributing Writer for 1 Million for Work Flexibility

84%

of remote workers feel a stronger sense of purpose than they did when working as traditional team members.

Companies that offer remote work options are more attractive.

Perhaps the greatest appeal of working remotely is having a career with the freedom to take control of personal time. The research is clear that getting this balance right makes for a happier, healthier employee—84% of remote workers feel a stronger sense of purpose than they did when working as traditional team members, and nearly 40% are strongly convinced that they're happier than their colleagues who go into the office every day. In turn, companies that prioritize their employees' work-life balance are increasingly attractive. In today's talent war, every company is looking at how to attract and retain the best talent, and having the right work- force is a major win.

Remote workers allow an organization to tap highly specialized skills.

Employers are increasingly looking for knowledge workers with highly evolved skills and education, and have recently discovered that a good majority of these evolved remote workers spend the majority of time away from an office. Highly specialized, multi-affiliated professionals (MAPs) are individuals with decades of experience, who value the autonomy and flexibility of contract work. MAPs represent a growing segment of the remote workforce — from managers, to lawyers, to CFOs, to consultants—they've been trained at top schools and firms and somewhere along the way chose to pursue independence. These specialized workers are engaged to perform a job or project without a long-term commitment from either side, and the economics of this type of engagement are increasingly driving both companies and MAPs to find each other.

Work is increasingly project-based.

In our State of the Services Economy report, 58% of businesses stated that they do mostly project-based work, and 89% said project-based work is trending up as a percentage of their total work. However, project-based work is much more complex, and it's a constant struggle to balance the supply of available resources and demand. In response, companies are leveraging more and more external freelancers and contractors to supplement their full-time employees in periods where there is a spike of activity, or a unique or temporary skill is required. This extendable workforce allows a business to engage the right skills and resources at the right moment; while reducing large investments of time and costs associated with recruiting, training, and managing resources and careers for company personnel. When hiring contractors, the ability to reach beyond your organization's immediate vicinity for this talent is a competitive advantage. Therefore, as your company begins to view freelancers and contractors as a growth engine for the business, you need to also develop an effective strategy to engage an increasingly remote, graphically dispersed workforce.

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IN THE NEXT SECTION

Learn how to strategically leverage a remote workforce at your organization.

Tips for Successfully Managing a Remote Workforce

The last chapter established that remote work is the work of the future, but how do you setup your organization to be successful? How do you overcome the challenges of supervising someone who is in a different location and time zone? How do you build trust and open lines of communication? How do you drive a sense of team when some, or all of your team, works remotely?

How do you drive a sense of team when some, or all of your team, works remotely?

The following will provide you with practical tips for managing a remote workforce:

Set expectations about communication.

Communication is both the biggest obstacle and solution to keeping a remote team "on the same page." Therefore, it is essential you establish clear communication guidelines from the very beginning. Expectations should be set for things like response time, who to include in what communication, and when you are expected to be available. A good communication plan will also discuss which formats are preferred for different types of communication. For example, when is it OK to use chat over email, and when is a phone call best practice? Finally, there should be clarity around the regular meetings and scheduled check-ins, including what information each team member is expected to contribute.

Share goals and successes.

Off site workers are at risk of feeling disconnected from the organization's goals and objectives. Even if they are great at their individual role, it's important that they have an understanding of what impact that is having on the business at large. Knowing how to measure goals and productivity is important for any manager-employee relationship, however it's even more important when the employee is remote and more likely to be insulated. It is also the manager's responsibility to communicate and share their remote team members successes with the broader team to help inspire and motivate remote workers.

Meet face-to-face.

In-person meetings are still important to building a rapport and strengthening relationships. In-person meetings also force you to be present in the conversation. When possible, travel and spend time together. If there is a particularly long distance or travel is not a viable option, use video chat technology like Google Hangouts to check in virtually as much as possible. Facial cues and recognizing emotion is an important aspect of your relationship with your team. It's easy to miss out on these cues if you're just using the phone for meetings, and/or doing most communication through written mediums. Consider a video hangout if you and another team member consistently have lackluster discussions.

Be proactive and impromptu.

One downside to being remote is that you miss serendipitous interactions in the office. For example, literally having a water-cooler conversation. Ironically, when dealing with remote workers, you need to be deliberate about these more casual conversations. You do not need to pre-schedule every meeting, just pick up the phone. Encourage the type of collaboration where everyone feels comfortable picking up the phone to ask a question, as opposed to simply relying on email and written forms of communication. Make it known that if a remote employee reaches out via phone, they get a call back. Responsiveness is key.

Get to know your team personally.

Today's geographically distributed workforce means you probably have colleagues on the other side of the world, and even though you may have worked with them for years, it's likely you have never met them in person. When managing a remote team, you need to make sure there is the opportunity for people to get to know each other on a personal level. What are their hobbies, their kids names? Also try to allow for all new members to have the opportunity to introduce themselves to the company in-person. It is imperative for each remote worker to feel involved and welcomed, especially when the majority of their time will be spent outside of the organization's four walls.
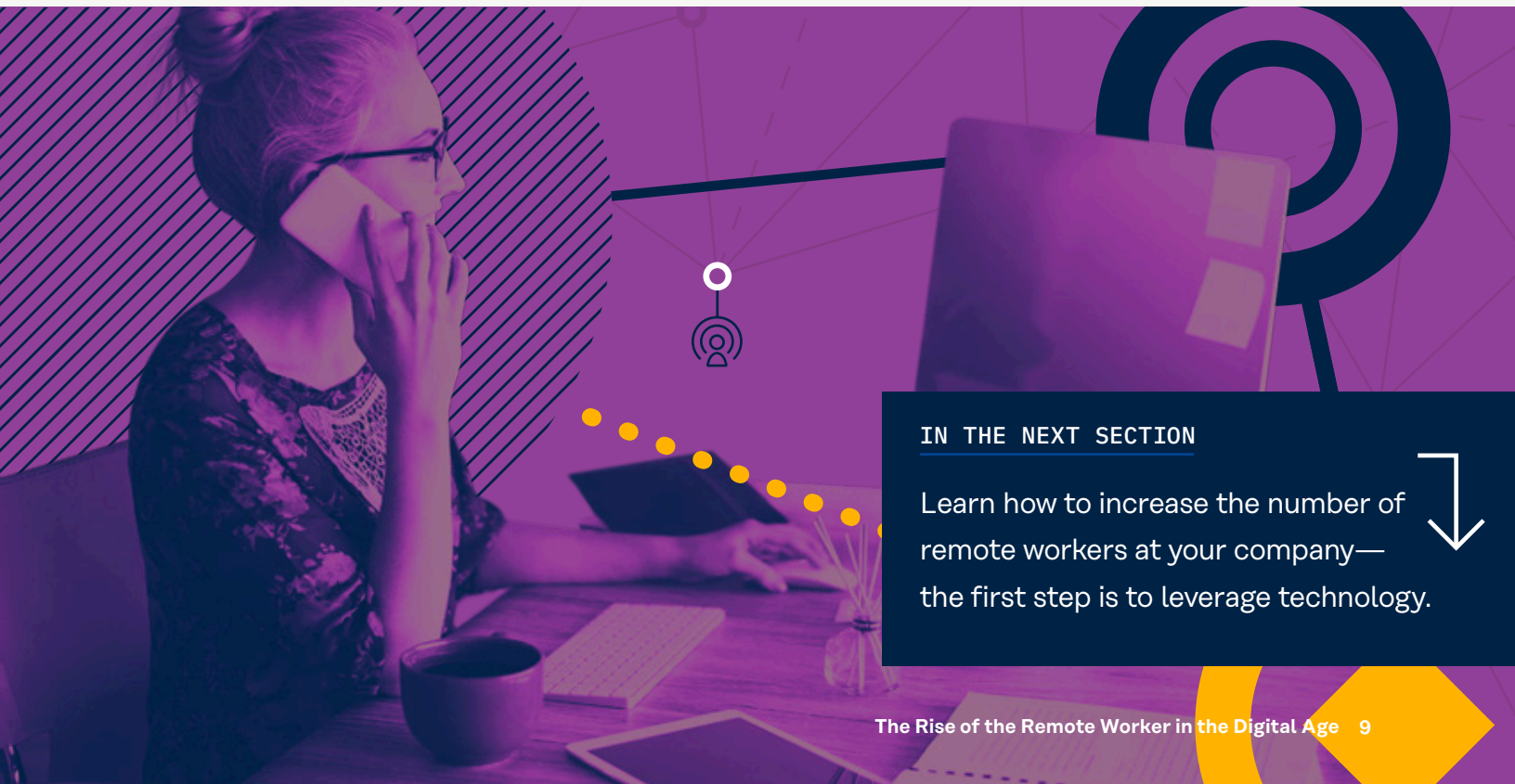
IN THE NEXT SECTION

Learn how to increase the number of remote workers at your company—the first step is to leverage technology.

The Role of Technology

In the past, conventional wisdom held that distant employees located far from the office would suffer from isolation, resulting in lower productivity, and detachment from the core team. However, technology has changed all that. Technology is arguably the single most important contributor to the rise of the remote worker, making it easier to be sure everyone is on task, staying productive, and collaborating appropriately. There are a variety of online tools that can help you do this; what's important is that you don't rely on a single tool, but instead leverage a combination, as each have their own place.

The following is an example of the technologies to consider to effectively manage your remote workforce:

Slack.

Slack brings all your communication together in one place. It's real-time messaging, archiving, and search for modern teams. You can organize your team conversations in open channels. Make a channel for a project, a topic, a team, or anything—everyone has a transparent view of all that's going on. For sensitive information, create private channels and invite a few team members. Slack is becoming increasingly popular as more teams start considering collaboration a requirement for success. Slack reduces email and meeting times, keeping all team communication in one place.

G Suite.

G Suite is the go-to office productivity suite for most companies that rely on collaboration for success. Google Docs is one of the applications included in G Suite and allows you to share content with anyone in your organization. Google Docs provides a space for all parties involved to edit, comment, or provide feedback as needed. Collaboration across offices is done in real-time with Google Docs.

Dropbox.

Dropbox is an example of a secure file sharing and storage system for businesses. It will help keep your files safe, synced, and easy to share. An account will allow you to post 2GB of personal cloud storage and allows you to access files anytime, anywhere. Dropbox boosts team collaboration without having to worry about sensitive company information being shared. Many IT professionals consider Dropbox the most safe and secure file sharing system on the market.

Google Hangouts

Google Hangouts.

Google Hangouts is an example of a video conferencing platform and chat tool. Conferencing platforms are a way for teams to gather under the same "roof" despite time differences, state lines, or global boundaries. These tools can replace face-to-face interaction and increase trust and camaraderie among dispersed teams. Google Hangouts is ideal for remote meetings because it allows up to 25 users to join a meeting at a time, and it's absolutely free.

Mavenlink

Mavenlink.

Mavenlink is a project management and resource planning solution that is designed for teams who may be geographically dispersed, so you can account for variables like location of expertise and geographic need. The nature of work has changed, and project management software has to do more than support time and expense functions. Mavenlink brings people together and allows for contextual collaboration around work projects, plans, tasks, file sharing, proofing, and more.

Instagram

Instagram and The Role of Social Media.

Social media technologies are gaining traction as a way of bridging the personal with the professional; especially with remote workers, who are otherwise disconnected from the kind of dialog that takes place in a traditional office setting. Social media allows remote teams to get to know each other's' personalities without face to face meetings. Not to mention, getting the team on social media will increase team engagement and should have a positive impact on company culture and team morale.

CONCLUSION

Remote Work is Revolutionary

Remote workers are on the rise. The nature of work is changing. Today, sharing ideas, face-to-face interactions, and collaborating in real-time are becoming effortless with the introduction of technologies that facilitate working across geographic boundaries.

And it's good for business too. Profits matter, and remote working is proving to be a cost effective and a highly efficient way to attract, retain, and deliver at scale and on budget. The rise of the remote worker is a remarkable—yes, even revolutionary—trend that is redefining the nature of work itself.

This new workforce represents a treasure trove of talent, promising future growth for employers challenged by a shortage of skills and increasing pressure to compete with global rivals. For employers of virtually all sizes and across nearly every industry, tapping into the strategic reservoir of remote workers is among both the biggest challenges and greatest opportunities of our day.

About Mavenlink for Collaboration

COLLABORATION AT THE ENTERPRISE LEVEL

Mavenlink is reinventing the way professional and creative services organizations work with distributed teams, contractors, and clients. We provide enterprise-class Software as a Service (SaaS) for project management, collaboration, resource planning, and financial management. With one platform to manage the entire customer lifecycle from proposal through invoicing, Mavenlink helps organizations like yours, improve business outcomes and successfully manage and scale your people, projects, and profits.

With Mavenlink you can gain immediate visibility into team utilization and productivity, and effectively and efficiently assign resources to particular projects. You will also know the impact of every project and resource on your bottom line, so you can make more informed hiring decisions when it comes to staffing for new projects with resource management software.

Get your free demo at www.mavenlink.com

"Mavenlink has completely transformed how we manage our department's workflow. We can now see a clear path thanks to the increased accuracy of our work capacity views."

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