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RUN » HUMAN RESOURCES

7 Things to Do When Creating an **Emergency Work-From-Home Policy** for COVID-19

With the coronavirus threatening the safety of working on-site, human resources experts offer their top tips for ensuring your employees are prepared to telecommute in a pinch.

By: Kristin Colella, Contributor

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CO— recently spoke to a handful of HR experts about how to create a telecommuting policy for unexpected events such as the current outbreak. Here’s what they had to say.

Ask for input

When drafting an emergency work-from-home policy, start by discussing the details with your managers. “It’s a good idea to draw input from the managers in all the different departments in your business, since they know the job best,” said Adam Calli, founder and principal consultant for Arc Human Capital, LLC in Vienna, Virginia. “Never underestimate the value of collaboration.”

Once you’ve spoken to your managers, you can then consider taking suggestions from your other employees. “There might be something that a specific employee does in their job that you’re not thinking about, or you haven’t considered that they need a specific tool,” said Patti Dunham, director of HR solutions for strategic HR inc.in Cincinnati. “It can be helpful to get input from everybody.”

Check equipment

For business operations to run as smoothly as possible off-site, you’ll need to make sure your employees have the right equipment, such as laptops, chargers, headsets, monitors, phones and possibly even fax machines and printers.

“If they don’t have what they need, ask yourself if you’re willing to purchase it and how much you’re willing to spend,” said Dunham. “Or if you have a storage closet in the office with extra equipment, you might want to consider pulling from that.”

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If you normally have mandatory core working hours, be sure to include those in your telecommuting policy.

Adam Calli, founder and principal consultant, Arc Human Capital, LLC

Define expectations

Although working from home might offer an exciting dose of freedom for your employees, it shouldn't be a free-for-all. "If you normally have mandatory core working hours, be sure to include those in your telecommuting policy," said Calli. "The same goes for any cloud-based timekeeping system you may already use." If you don't have a formal timekeeping system in place, you might consider asking employees to log their time in a spreadsheet, or you can ask managers to schedule calls with employees to make sure they are staying productive.

Prioritize security

Be sure to let employees know how you expect them to keep information secure when working off-site. "It's critical to set clear expectations for private and public internet connections, the storage of both hard copy and digital files, privacy when speaking about confidential matters on the phone, and any issue that could expose the company to undue risk," said Jaime Klein, CEO of Inspire Human Resources in New York.

It's also a good idea to make sure employees have up-to-date anti-virus software. You might also consider providing multi-factor authentication (MFA), which makes it more difficult for hackers to access

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Don't forget about "non-employees"

When you roll out your message, such as through company email or an internal company site, don't forget to find a way to reach the people who might not automatically receive official work communications from you, such as volunteers, independent contractors, vendors, clients, interns and recruits (who might have an upcoming interview scheduled). "Think broadly about who is part of your team, even if they're not getting a W-2," said Calli. "They need to know what's going on."

Our full small business Coronavirus coverage:

[Coronavirus: 8 Things Your Small Business Needs to Do](#)

[5 Resources to Help Your Small Business Survive the Coronavirus](#)

[7 Things to Do When Creating an Emergency Work-From-Home Policy for COVID-19](#)

[Staying Connected With Customers Through the Coronavirus Outbreak](#)

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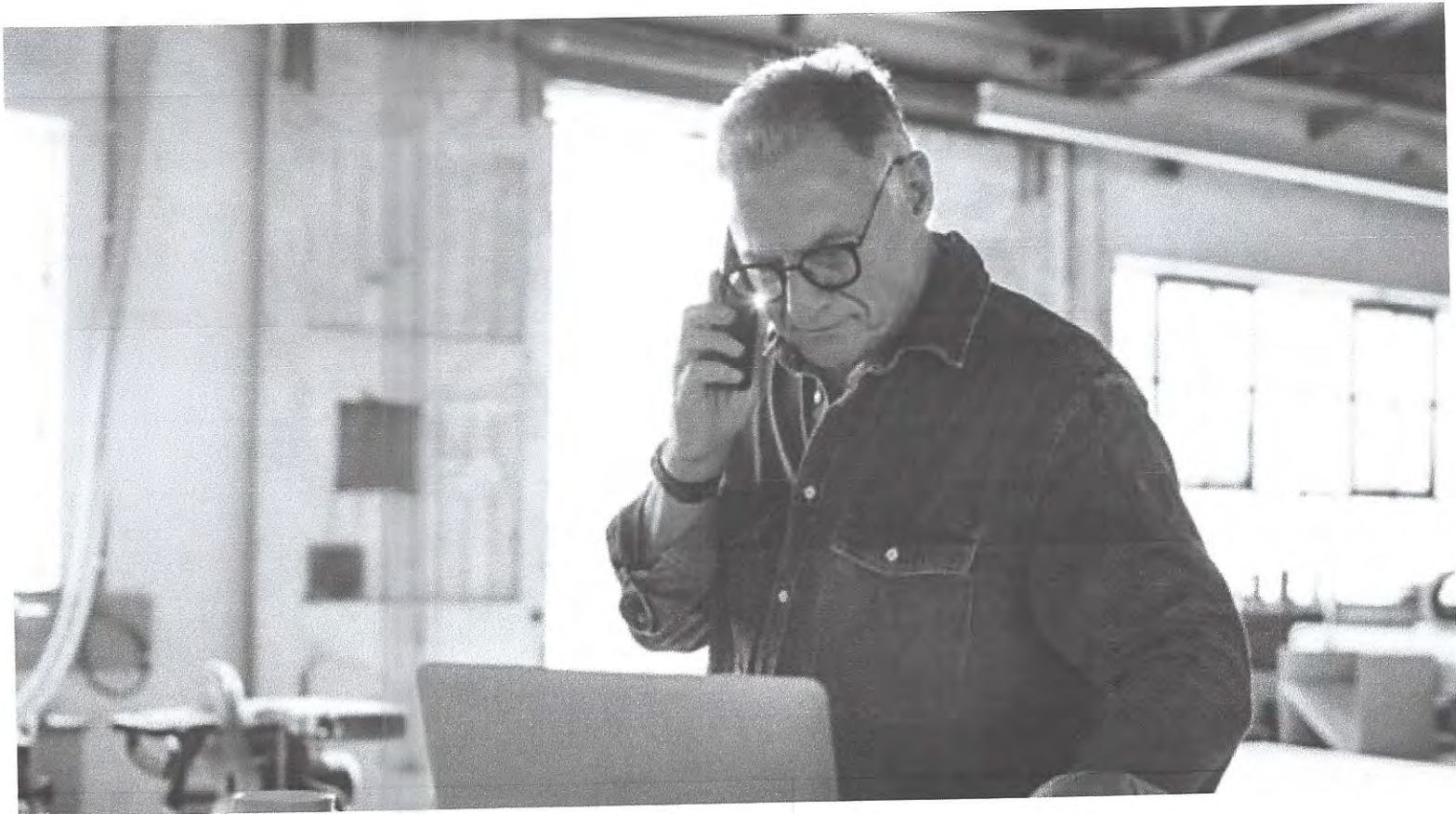
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Coronavirus: 8 Things Your Small Business Needs to Do

Here are the top CDC-recommended tips that small business owners can take to mitigate risk, protect employees and support customers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By: Emily Heaslip, Contributor

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The U.S. Chamber of Commerce offers a coronavirus toolkit with a compilation of the CDC's recommendations for businesses and workers across the country. Here are the key points and immediate steps the CDC recommends.

Establish a remote work option

With plenty of people already working remotely, there are a lot of free tools business owners can utilize so that teams can stay in touch and keep working even if they aren't in the same place.

Implement a remote work policy that covers when you expect your team to be online or available, how to communicate (via email, Slack, or video call, for instance), and what deliverables each team member is responsible for completing.

[Read more: [4 Ways Your Business Can Support Remote Workers](#)]

Reduce meetings and travel

Try to keep opportunities for exposure to the virus to a minimum. Postpone any team meetings or hold them virtually. Skip any conferences or other planned business travel. If your workers get sick because of travel or meetings, you could have a liability issue on your hands, or you will have to manage low morale and sick leave requests.

Give employees flexibility

Schools across the country are closing, as are offices, stores, businesses and commercial centers. With the country slowly moving toward total lockdown, you will need to be flexible with your employees' time.

Some team members may have to leave unexpectedly if their child's daycare closes. Others may have

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As Harvard Business Review reports, “When customers are separated from the work that’s being done behind the scenes to serve them, they appreciate the service less and then they value the service less.” Describe the steps you’re taking to mitigate risk and give them insight into the steps you’re taking to help the community.

“Keep your employees and your customers safe by being as proactive as possible about cleanliness.”

Be obsessive about hygiene

Stop the spread of the virus by following these health and safety tips from the CDC:

No handshakes: Use a non-contact method for greetings.

Wash your hands: Employees should wash their hands when they arrive and every time they enter the premises, as well as frequently throughout the day.

Try not to touch your face, and remind employees to do the same

Constantly and regularly disinfect surfaces, including doorknobs, handrails, the POS system, tables and desks.

Keep your employees and your customers safe by being as proactive as possible about cleanliness.

Shift your sales strategy to online

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If you're closing your store, find ways to keep your employees earning a paycheck by selling on social media, putting your email list to good use or using a video tool to reach new leads.

Consider business interruption insurance

Business interruption insurance may be an option for you if you have significant business losses as a result of shutting down from the pandemic. "Ask your insurance broker about business interruption insurance to cover unexpected major events and see what qualifies for coverage. It may not cover this emergency, but you'll be better prepared for the next time your business suffers similar economic losses," reports USA Today.

[[Read more: Guide to SMB Insurance](#)]

Plan for the long term

Though China and other economies are already starting to recover, the spread of the coronavirus is still extending throughout the world, creating a ripple effect that will impact us for some time.

As reported in *SmallBizTrends*, "27% of businesses expect the coronavirus to have a moderate to high impact on their revenue. Another 30% expect the virus to have a moderate to high impact on their supply chain."

Speak to your suppliers, investors, partners and local officials on a daily basis to learn how you can start to implement safeguards that will help you stay above the red while officials work to contain COVID-19. It might be a while until your small business gets back to business as usual.

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