

9 Questions to Ask to Boost Your Remote Workers' Productivity

Telecommuting has become a workplace reality as the coronavirus pandemic has forced all non-essential workers to work from home, disrupting our schedules, routines and mental and physical health.

As more technologies become available and workers adjust to this new normal, Brian Kost, senior director of the Workplace Possibilities program at The Standard, has identified nine questions for employers to consider to ensure the ergonomic needs of their remote employees don't go unnoticed.

1. How can accommodating an employee who works from home benefit the organization?

Just because a teleworker is not in the office does not mean an employer can overlook his or her work environment. Bad ergonomic habits, if left unaddressed, could mean higher healthcare costs for the employer, lower productivity and the increased potential for an employee to sustain a medical condition.

2. Where will the employee be working from in his or her home?

Working from home might mean working in a more casual environment than the traditional workplace. Casual can mean more comfortable, but from an ergonomics perspective, it can also mean bad posture, muscle strain and potential pain later.

3. Can the person work in a solitary environment?

If deciding whether or not an employee can work remotely, there are a variety of things an employer will want to take into consideration – especially the person's emotional capacity to work in a different or solitary environment. Often, employers will

request that an employee who wants to work remotely on a permanent basis fill out an assessment form to determine if the person is a good fit or has the right temperament for telecommuting.

4. Does the employee have the right workstation set up?

Having a dedicated space set up with ergonomics in mind is the first step to a successful work-from-home environment. Some of the most helpful solutions for telework arrangements are a proper-fitting chair, computer screens that are adjusted to the right height and ergonomic keyboards.

5. Will the employee have proper safeguards in place to ensure proprietary information is not at risk?

Many organizations, universities and government agencies ask employees to complete and sign a telework agreement before being allowed to work at home. Similar to the assessment that evaluates temperament, these agreements evaluate the employee's environment by requiring him or her to complete a home safety checklist. The checklist covers the employee's workstation, home

safety and security. Remember: Security of an employer's property, such as a computer, is also important.

6. Does the employee have a medical condition or injury that requires accommodations?

It's important to ensure that an employee has the proper equipment suited for his or her needs. A fitted chair to improve posture and reduce back strain, or an ergonomic keyboard to reduce tension on muscles could both prevent future injuries or pain.

7. Can the employer's disability carrier provide accommodations or provide the right set up to help the employee at home?

Consultants from the employer's disability carrier can help make sure your employees have an ergonomically friendly telework setup to help them achieve optimal productivity and encourage healthy behaviors.

8. Would the employee allow an ergonomic consultant to assess their home work-space to determine the right set up?

While some employees may be weary of having someone come to their home to help adjust or implement their workstation set up, it's an important part of the process. If that isn't an option, the Occupational Safety & Health Administration has an online tool that can help employees create a safe and personalized workstation, all while reinforcing proper mechanics.

9. Does the employer have a vendor to source ergonomic equipment?

Not all vendors that work with an employer's facilities services department can source ergonomic equipment, or the right type of ergonomic equipment. A consultant from the employer's disability carrier can help weigh in on options and what should be taken into consideration before an item is purchased.

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