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The Disadvantages of Working Remotely: How Legal Professionals Can Overcome Them

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The Increase In Remote Work

In this world of “new normal,” remote work is here to stay – so the question is, how do we effectively manage this new way of working moving forward? While there are considerable advantages to working from home, there are also disadvantages of remote working for legal professionals that need to be addressed. In this pandemic, and moving forward, some degree of remote work will become commonplace, so it’s time to get ahead on managing performance and balancing the pros and cons that will inevitably crop up.

In this blog, we’ll be providing insights on some of these disadvantages and how you can better integrate fixes that are both actionable and effective toward maintaining your level of day-to-day efficiency.

Disadvantages of Remote Working and How to Fix It for Legal Professionals

Difficulty With Time Tracking

The Disadvantage: For a firm depending on billable hours to maintain profitability with client work, getting accurate hours from your workers can be a big challenge when working remotely. Time may feel different for people at home, and keeping track of billable tasks can easily get lost in the shuffle of other distractions.

The Fix: Time Tracking Software

Without the constant flux of in-person client visits and immediate office distractions, many law firm workers of all departments have an opportunity to divide up their day accordingly. By using project management software that effectively gathers time spent on matters takes the headache out of manually inputting it every day. This also keeps communication clear on the status without the need for constant status updates or pesky emails that clog the inbox and stunt productivity flow.

Centerbase offers automatic [time tracking](#), so you can capture every billable hour spent on client-based calls and interactions. Your billing department and your bottom line will thank you.

Blurred Work and Personal Lines

The Disadvantage: Without a clear separation between work and home, blurred lines can create rapid burnout in remote employees. This can result in lowered performance, inaccurately recorded working hours, and poor time management that affects day-to-day duties. Since you aren't able to monitor their habits and what goes on, how do you appropriately measure time worked in comparison to hours off?

The Fix: Communicate processes and benefits

With everything around people working remotely still feeling new and unfamiliar, it's important to take that extra mile to communicate and clarify processes and resources available to everyone. Reiterate what hours everyone needs to be available, and reassure that they don't have to be connected to their computers all hours of the evening. Many are juggling between being a full-time worker, parent, and teacher right now, so a little understanding also goes a long way.

Due to the pandemic, many healthcare providers have lifted some of their restrictions on telehealth appointments. Check what your benefits packages are offering, and consider adding a telehealth option for employees to get appointments easier and help maintain mental health during this turbulent change. This may not reflect immediately, but employees will have an extra layer of resources to help in case things become too blurred. Not to mention the benefit of additional help from experts to better manage their day-to-day routine. That trust and investment in their well-being will definitely pay off in their productivity in the long run.

Increased Risk for Miscommunication and Document Management

The Disadvantage: Less face-to-face interaction means more chances for miscommunication or no

communication entirely from staff. This can create confusion and perpetuate uncertainty that mounts with every email that goes un-replied or client followup that's ignored. Or worse, the possibility of technology failure. If a VPN doesn't allow access to all areas of a matter, and staff are stuck having to circumvent the system or store sensitive information where it's not safe

With remote work, your staff needs to communicate like a well-oiled machine – even more so than they did while in the office. You'll need a system and a communication model that works for everyone and runs efficiently without detracting from everyday duties.

The Fix: Document management from anywhere

By easing the ability for workers to document matter updates – whether they're at home, or even on their phone in line at the grocery store on their lunch break – you'll help continue the open communication culture you had in an office environment. Ensuring you provide updated permissions for remote workers to add notes to files and safely access key information in real-time will make a huge difference in keeping everyone aligned. Also, plan daily huddles and a longer weekly meeting to check the pulse of everyone's workload and pace. Are things harder for them now? Is something stopping them from doing their jobs from a software or [operations](#) standpoint? Open up the floor and listen.

Centerbase's [document management](#) lets everyone retrieve and share documents easily through programs you use all the time, such as Microsoft Word and your own web browser.

The Risk of Decreased Client-Facing Work

The Disadvantage: Lack of client contact can be problematic for some – especially those who may need to be in-person for legal proceedings or prefer face-to-face updates regarding their case. Some of that client-facing work can bolster the attorney-client relationship and keep confidence high regarding their case. This can be especially taxing for attorneys accustomed to more traditional office meetings and client interactions.

The Fix: Use a client portal

Old software depends on cumbersome intake forms and notes that have to be manually uploaded to a digital format. Even worse, much of the client conversation could be in a paralegal's mind, but the interaction could be recorded or notated incorrectly in the file.

With a speedy, 24/7 client contact with the Centerbase mobile or web app, our [versatile client portal](#) gives clients everything they need, when they need it. This can be a gamechanger for remote work, especially since you can keep conversations and notes directly tied to a client's account so you'll always remember where you last left off on their case.

Reduced Collaboration and Networking Opportunities

The Disadvantage: An unfortunate pitfall around the disadvantages of remote working can be a decrease in referrals or new sources to find clients. And without in-person events and community networking, you may find collaboration between colleagues screech to a halt, which can hit incoming business hard.

The Fix: Online events and weekly team meetings

One of the nice things with remote work is, on some level, everyone can stay connected and informed through social media channels. If your firm has a Facebook or Instagram page, consider holding live sessions where you answer commonly asked questions and provide legal advice with a few attorneys in quick, bite-size sessions.

Appoint a legal assistant on your team to help manage the page and arrange times where attorneys and their colleagues from other firms can also participate. For example, if you've got a personal injury firm, you can collaborate with someone from another area of law like family or criminal to have a wider scope of knowledge to answer questions. By tagging each other, you can repurpose this content into blogs and other resources and create backlinks to help flesh out a content library for people searching and asking online for legal help.

Increased Home Office Distractions

The Disadvantage: Between children crying, laundry going off, video games, and phone notifications, the distractions are endless while working from home. While some can thrive in this environment, others struggle immensely and procrastinate on tasks by doing chores or finding their favorite comfy spot on the sofa. All of which leads to feeling unfocused and unmotivated.

The Fix: Flexible work times

For any children in e-learning, some workers may thrive when the kids are done with the day and can focus on tasks undisturbed while little ones watch their favorite show. Be prepared to ask workers if some added flexibility to their hours would help keep tasks on schedule to prepare for necessary matters deadlines and client updates. You'd be surprised how this model can help boost productivity during remote work, because everyone's home lives are different.

Striking a Balance with Remote Work

The key to continuing business with working from home is to be aware of the disadvantages of remote working and find a harmonious balance. There's no single clear-cut solution to remote working. Being aware that every firm is going to have a unique set of clients and matters means you'll need to experiment and communicate with your staff to see how they're managing and balancing home and work life.

Do they feel isolated from each other knowing their priorities? If so, how can you help bridge that gap in a way that drives culture and keeps drawbacks of remote working to a minimum? Remove those barriers, and you'll find remote employees will feel better about communication and this new transition.

Another big part of counteracting the disadvantages of remote working can be ensuring their technological access is sound, and doesn't inhibit them from completing tasks and updating matters.

Conclusion

There are clearly pros and cons to working from home, and it's important to know how to best prepare your workforce as they transition between remote and in-office work. Although clear disadvantages to remote exist, we hope this was helpful on how you can ease the burden and create an environment that keeps your workers reassured and prepared to continue adapting.

Do you have any other questions about how to transition your workload to remote capabilities for legal professionals? Centerbase has adaptability and permission-based access, so everyone only sees what's needed to do their jobs most effectively. Feel free to [schedule a no-obligation demo](#) and discern how our software can best help your needs going into this new world of remote work in law firms.

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