



What to Look for in Remote Employees

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SUMMARY

It takes a certain type of employee to successfully work from home for the long term. When you're recruiting remote employees, consider for these necessary characteristics.

Working from home (WFH) has become a fixture in workforce policy and talent management. For those companies intending to [make WFH permanent](#) or semi-permanent, it may be helpful to modify recruiting and hiring practices for remote workers. This means developing new practices and perspectives to identify and attract people who are suited to work and succeed in this new reality.

While WFH employees need to have the proper hard skillsets, soft skills, particularly for the digital age, are equally as important. To be as [productive](#) as possible, remote employees need to be determined and have time management and organizational skills, as well as enough of a command of digital tools to keep on top of the work and collaborate.

“Work-from-home employees must also possess very strong communication skills,” says Andrew Hinkelman, founder of [Priority-1 Group](#), a leadership coaching and consulting organization. During 25 years in the tech industry as a chief technology officer, Hinkelman built remote teams.

Internal motivation and drive are also critical to WFH success, believes Stewart Guss, founder of [Stewart J. Guss, Injury Accident Lawyers](#).

“People in sales and recruiters tend to be the type of people you want in work-from-home positions. They’re usually independent,” he says.

“The ability to stay focused, despite distractions in the home environment, is also vital to WFH success,” adds James Cassel, co-founder and chairman of Miami-based [Cassel Salpeter](#), an investment banking firm. “It’s one thing to deal with distractions from colleagues at the office, but quite another to be faced with the temptation to address domestic issues.”

The Differences in WFH Recruiting and Hiring

Certain traits and attributes will be of more importance than others when you’re [recruiting and hiring remote employees](#). Consider probing for the following traits when interviewing potential WFH employees.

Self-direction. “The ability to take the initiative to set goals and complete work with limited supervision is essential,” says Tracey Wik, managing director of talent and organization effectiveness at [GrowthPlay](#), a research-based sales talent consulting company.

“Look for work-from-home employees who demonstrate the intrinsic motivation to meet expectations without a lot of hand-holding,” she adds.

Comfort in using and learning new digital tools. Employees need to be adept at using digital tools for themselves and for collaboration purposes. Ultimately, it’s on the company to ensure that their employees are sufficiently trained on the tools they’re expected to use in their day to day, but ensuring that the candidate will be comfortable with the expectation of learning and using these tools is critical.

Time management efficiency. “Look for employees who can maintain a steady, unhurried pace for task assignments and remain available or implement a backup system when unavailable to ensure others’ needs are managed,” says Wik.

Secure work environment. There are best practices around how to create a [secure home office](#). This includes [cybersecurity protocols](#) for equipment and a space free of distractions. Look for employees who understand the gravity of cybersecurity and take it seriously.

Ability to effectively communicate. “Successfully interpreting and digesting information from a variety of sources and communicating effectively is an

important attribute in a work-from-home employee,” says Terry Salo, senior HR consultant for outsourced human resources company [strategic HR Inc.](#) This is especially important as communication during WFH mainly occurs without tonal or facial cues. A keen understanding of how messages can be interpreted over digital channels will go a long way in ensuring context doesn’t get lost in email and on messenger platforms.

How to Spot Great Remote Employees

You can use various methods to determine if potential WFH employees possess the ideal skills for remote work.

“I determine work-from-home suitability by asking if the person has experience with independent work,” says Megan Marrs, founder of [K9 of Mine](#), which provides dog care resources and information. “I ask if they’ve freelanced or completed independent projects in their spare time. I’ve also found that [introverts](#) tend to fare better with remote work than extroverts.”

“Have them complete a personality assessment test to check their soft skills,” he says.

It’s also helpful to ask potential WFH employees how they structure their days, adds Marrs.

“Those who have developed a routine to their workday will likely have the necessary mindset for creating work/life balance,” he explains.

Cassel suggests looking for self-starters with self-reliant character traits. You also want someone who has shown adaptability and persistence in their prior work experience, especially those who can change course if necessary.

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One way to identify these traits is to ask the candidate about which project they’re most proud of. After they explain what it is, encourage them to discuss the dynamics of how it came to life, focusing especially on where

communication and collaboration took place. The objective of this line of questioning is to create an opportunity for the candidate to explain their leadership role in the project, hopefully to focus on how their bias towards action helped bring the project through any roadblocks or hurdles.

Helping Hires New to Remote Work

You may find that your new hire is suited for WFH, but not accustomed to it. [Make new employees feel comfortable](#) quickly by providing clarity.

“Clarity is vital,” says Wik. “This includes clarity about the culture of the organization and how that will manifest virtually, and clarity about expectations.”

To ensure that all expectations are clear with new remote employees, opt for phone or video calls, suggests, Ed Mitzen, founder of healthcare marketing agency [Fingerpaint](#). “Set frequent check-ins as employees get acclimated to their new roles.”

“Consider dedicating an office liaison to new employees. Such a person can help train, monitor, coach and groom new employees to be ready to meet company expectations,” says Cassel. “Additionally, company mentors can show new work-from-home employees the ins and outs of the business and its leaders’ expectations.”

Patience is also vital. “It can take several weeks or months to adjust to this new working style if employees are new to working from home,” says Wik.