One Team, Many Places: Managing Employees Across Work Models and State Lines

By: Alison Milioto

Today's employers have a lot to consider when it comes to how and where they build their team. After all, many employees can do a lot of their work from anywhere, especially when it comes to office work that doesn't require in-person customer interactions.

Both young and established companies often waffle between remote, in-office or hybrid work models. So, how can you find a solution that supports your business and productivity while providing the work-life balance employees now expect?

What about hiring across state lines? Just because you opt for a remote or hybrid model doesn't necessarily mean you should recruit employees from anywhere.

Let's explore the benefits, drawbacks and best practices to consider when managing your team effectively from anywhere.

Remote vs. In-Office vs. Hybrid: What's Right for Your Team?

The COVID-19 pandemic and the years since have proved that a wide range of work can be done from anywhere. Perhaps you've reached a point where you're wondering if it's time for a change in how and where your team works.

Remote Work

Remote work offers several significant benefits for employees, who enjoy more flexibility to attend to everyday responsibilities, from doing laundry to picking up their kids. Additionally, not having a commute saves employees time and reduces wear and tear on their vehicles, allowing them to focus more on their work.

A growing body of research indicates that remote work can be more productive. ActivTrak's 2025 State of Workplace report found that remote work improves productivity, with fully remote workers showing higher productive time (+29 minutes) versus other worker types.

Of course, employers can also reduce office space costs with a fully remote team, while hybrid companies can save on shared workspaces. Global Workplace Analytics estimated that U.S. employers can save an average of $11,000 per half-time remote worker per year, thanks to increased productivity, lower real estate costs, reduced absenteeism and turnover and better disaster preparedness.

However, remote work comes with its own challenges. Leaders need to think creatively to foster employee connections and morale, such as scheduling more frequent check-ins or planning virtual team-building exercises.

Not to mention, fully remote work requires significant trust among all team members. Many employers struggle to strike a balance between offering support and trust and micromanaging. If you plan on hosting company-wide events, you may also have to cover employees' travel costs, depending on your team's location.

In-Office Work

For certain types of companies and teams, an in-office model is more effective. Being on-site provides more face time, which can more easily foster relationships and trust. Speaking of trust, leadership can have better insights into

what employees' day-to-day tasks and productivity look like.

An in-office model might also be essential if your company works with customers in person.

On the other hand, offices come with their own distractions, such as water cooler conversations. These interruptions often impact productivity, potentially even leading to tension and conflicts among employees.

A Zippia report revealed that, although the average employee is productive for 60% of their workday, office employees are only productive for 31% of their workday — that's just two hours and 53 minutes a day.

Additionally, there are the costs of office space, which include expenses such as utilities and equipment.

Hybrid Work

Considering the pros and cons of remote and in-office work, it's not surprising that the hybrid model works well for many teams. This arrangement enables employers to foster and maintain camaraderie while creating a better work-life balance for employees.

We have seen many companies achieve great success with the hybrid model because it effectively blends the best of both worlds, offering a great compromise. Additionally, it keeps your team local rather than scattered across the country.

A 2024 study by Stanford economist Nicholas Bloom found that employees who work from home "are just as productive and as likely to be promoted as their fully office-based peers."

Additionally, employee turnover dropped by 33% among workers who switched to hybrid work.

Hiring Across State Lines

Are you opting for a remote or hybrid work model? You may think you can easily hire people nationwide — but it's not that simple.

Yes, there are several significant advantages to expanding your talent pool. One major benefit of hiring out-of-state candidates is the lower cost of living and average wages. Additionally, the abundance of talent across the country opens up a significantly larger pool from which to find the right candidate for the position.

However, hiring in multiple states means you must stay up to date on labor laws and regulations in every state where you have employees. We don't recommend extending offers until you've vetted those regulations. Some states, such as California, Colorado and New York, are more challenging than others.

> *Considering the pros and cons of remote and in-office work, it's not surprising that the hybrid model works well for many teams. This arrangement enables employers to foster and maintain camaraderie while creating a better work-life balance for employees.*

So, don't collect employees across states like trading cards! Instead, stick to a few states that work well with your company and have straightforward labor laws and regulations.

Top Tips to Find What Works for Your Organization

Much of this comes down to your mindset and approach. Remember, what works for other businesses may not work for yours.

Your policy doesn't necessarily have to be the same for all employees. For example, you may need an office manager to greet customers who come in to drop off payments, paperwork or to meet with other employees. However, if someone's role is not customer-facing, they can be treated differently when it comes to working remotely.

Setting expectations from the start is crucial. Ensure that each job description specifies whether the role requires the individual to be present in the building for a specific reason.

Determine what is best for your compa-

ny culture. If you're making a transition, monitor its effects on your team and work environment. You can always try things on a trial basis without fully committing.

Some employers really like the hybrid model as a way to test what works for their team.

Choosing to go remote or hybrid? Do these things ahead of time:

- Research technology that will make remote communication more streamlined and secure (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Slack, Zoom, Google Meet, etc.).

- Set clear expectations for employee workspace and distractions.

- Be proactive in finding ways to stay connected.

Some companies have a "camera on, camera ready" policy, meaning even if it is an internal meeting, you must be present on a virtual meeting. This rule can significantly enhance communication and collaboration among the team.

You'll also want to gain an understanding of a remote employee's home environment. When interviewing for a client's remote role, we typically ask candidates two key questions:

- Can you confirm you will not be the sole provider of care for a dependent in the home while you are working?

- Do you have a designated workspace?

Work from home doesn't mean stay home with the kids while working. You can set boundaries and expectations.

On the other hand, if your team has been working remotely or on a hybrid basis and you decide to return to the office, provide a justifiable reason for your decision. "Because we want to" and "Because remote doesn't work" don't count! A valid reason might be that in-office work fosters a stronger sense of human connection, a more positive employee

experience and a more cohesive overall company culture.

A December 2024 Stanford survey found that more than half of respondents would quit or start looking for a new job if their employers mandated returning to the office full-time.

Another report by Great Place to Work found that "mandating where employees work dampens productivity, whether onsite or remote." However, the evidence also found that tailoring policies by role or team motivates employees to go the extra mile.

Whatever you do, remember that flexibility is key — companies are more likely to succeed when they're willing to pivot if something isn't working. ∎

Alison Milioto is the cofounder of BlueLion, a New Hampshire-based HR consulting firm. She has more than 20 years of experience in human resources and operations. Milioto helps organizations align their HR strategies with business goals, drawing on her deep expertise to support clients across industries. She has been recognized as a Union Leader "40 Under 40" honoree and was recently named one of New Hampshire's 200 most influential business leaders by NH Business Review. Under her leadership, BlueLion was named Business of the Year by Business NH Magazine in 2024.

Reprinted by permission of Standard Publishing Corp. © 2025.