Work-from-home programmes

By Olefile Moea, Executive Director, Fairheads Benefit Services

In these challenging and uncertain times, companies are needing to set up work-from-home programmes for their employees. There are often a multitude of potential communication and technology hurdles that need to be overcome.

Here are a few pointers to guide you in the exercise which Fairheads has been fortunate enough to have done in late 2016 when we instituted a partial work-from-home programme following a call from the City of Cape Town to reduce congestion on the roads.

People

People of course are a company's primary asset. Above all, it is important to help cultivate a positive attitude among staff to working from home. After all, there are benefits from working from home – no traffic jams, no children's lifts to do, the comfort of your home as well as perhaps the comfort provided by pets.

Then, staff need to know the boundaries of working from home. They need to commit to being contactable during office hours and complete their daily allocation of work. They also need to participate in online meetings when required. It's best to articulate the do's and don'ts of your programme in an addendum to the employment contract.

Sending regular, source-reliable updates about COVID-19 to help your staff to adhere to social distancing and appropriate disinfecting is also very important. They should be reminded that cellphones and laptops also need to be sanitised at least once daily.

Technology

Clearly this is the key to a successful work-from-home programme. You may need to invest in technology but it will be worth it.

Most important is: do your staff have good internet connections? If not, you may need to provide them with WiFi / LTE routers.

Your staff will either need a laptop or a desktop which is portable. We provide each staff member with a company desktop computer that has been locked down and is not able to be loaded with software other than that from the company.

You will need to decide which software will be the most effective for online meetings, be this What's App, Skype, Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Send clear, user-friendly instructions to staff so that they can download and operate the software. It is a good idea to have a helpdesk available for "techies" to help staff online if necessary.

Here is a short checklist for companies:

- Is your network capable?

- Can you enable the use of remote desktop to personal computers in office?

- Does your virtual private network (VPN) allow sufficient connectivity?

- For remote video conferencing, is software installed and are cameras, speakers and microphones enabled?

- Can the system be accessed 24/7?

- Prepare for hardware breakdowns and connectivity issues.

Human resources department

The HR department should touch base and review all employee benefits.

If staff are working from home, this is the same as being in the office. Leave should be applied for on a normal basis, that is should leave be required, normal leave applications should made.

It is probably also a good time to remind retirement fund members to update their nomination forms.

You might also want to reach out to pensioners and remind them of special steps they need to take to ensure their health is protected.

Compliance

Your compliance officer should check the law regarding occupational health and safety, as well as any other insurances that apply company-wide. Make sure these cover all bases adequately.

As a final word, a work from Home programme will work best if there is an established, sound culture within a company, with a strong degree of trust. It is a good idea perhaps to send all staff regular motivational communications, explaining the company's values, mission and vision – in order to maintain a sense of teamwork and cohesion.

So let us make this work for us all – families, business, the environment and the healthcare system - and help the country cope through this unprecedented pandemic.

ENDS