

# How to Prepare Your Firm for the Future Workplace

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Reboot. The COVID pandemic was a tragedy for everyone affected, but it had the side effect of being a reboot of the modern workplace. It helped uncover unproductive ways of working. It forced companies to adopt modern technology practices. And after over a year working from home, it helped many people realize the benefits of being in a room with work colleagues.

The end of COVID is still uncertain, but one thing is clear: its effects will ripple through accounting work environments for years to come. Let's cover some of these changes and discuss how your firm can adapt to thrive.

## **1. Flexible work is here to stay**

Remote work was already a trend before COVID, but during the pandemic it became mainstream. Companies like Adobe and Amazon are allowing employees to work remotely indefinitely. Many companies have invested considerably into technology infrastructure to operate remotely, and as new COVID variants emerge, there's a balancing act between returning to the old normal and finding new ways to operate.

Here's one emerging trend: Pushback against pure remote work. [52% of US workers](#) say remote work is difficult since they miss interacting with coworkers, while 27% feel lonely or isolated working remotely. Employers are taking notice, with 54% of employees saying their employer allows a hybrid schedule with a mix of remote and in-office work.

Employers and employees will continue to negotiate the benefits and flexibility that works best, but what's certain is that workplaces of the future need to have the technological and HR foundations to support a more flexible way of operating.

## **2. Best practices for onboarding have changed**

Part of the challenge around flexible workplaces is building a technological foundation to sustain remote work. Human resources is at the forefront in building that foundation.

For example, onboarding and offboarding functions are as important in this new environment as they've always been. Giving a new employee a solid welcome can help determine the course and quality of the work they do for you. Conversely, when workers leave, offboarding them effectively means you'll have quality feedback to improve your workplace, and your employee may refer other workers to you.

The question is: how can you onboard and offboard effectively when you're not working

together in an office? Leverage technology.

It starts with a video call as soon as possible once the new employee has been hired, getting them set up with accounts for tax or other software, and giving them a mentor or buddy to help walk them through the process. Be clear about your expectations around their performance and your policies around work-life balance and off-time.

When offboarding, have a plan in place to make sure you understand why the employee is leaving. Be sure they feel respected as part of the process. Doing this will increase the likelihood they'll leave you positive reviews on sites like Glassdoor, refer other employees to you, or even return in the future.

To read more tips about onboarding and offboarding, check out [this article](#) from CPA Practice Advisor.

### **3. Security threats**

Remote work makes it possible for employees to connect anytime, anywhere. It also creates a variety of ways bad actors can access your IT ecosystem. Cyber attackers are seeking to exploit vulnerable devices and networks to gain access to critical business information.

IT executives and other leaders should mount a two-pronged approach to help protect their organization against cyber threats. First, analyze the devices and networks employees are using to transmit business-critical information. Second, form a long-term plan for how the organization will secure itself against cyberthreats.

Planning must include training employees so they carry out best practices for updating their hardware and software, avoiding phishing attacks, and implementing company policies. A security plan should also cover the IT ecosystem and any technology such as VPNs or cloud hosting used to help safeguard your assets.

To learn more about securing the workplace of the future, check out [this article](#) from McKinsey. To read some accounting-specific tips, check out [this post](#) from Swizznet's own Wes Stillman.

### **4. Working conditions and attitudes**

COVID's impacts have been both outward and more subtle. For example, worker optimism has dipped slightly, though 86% of workers still say they feel optimistic about the next five years. That slight drop in optimism makes sense given that about a quarter of employees have been laid off or suffered a pay cut during the pandemic. On the bright side, there was a huge jump in the proportion of workers who feel they are able to leverage flexible work arrangements: 67%, versus 26% before the pandemic.

As a result, employers should be proactive in how they structure contracts and reward employees. Financial stipends, such as signing bonuses, are an obvious way to attract workers. Allowing employees flexibility in how and where they work is another non-financial way to retain workers.

Finally, about half of workers (52%) feel parental pay provisions will cease within a year, and women continue to feel less assured about job prospects than men. Developing a parental support program and taking steps to eliminate the gender gap is a surefire way to attract and retain high-quality employees over the coming years.

## **5. Technology**

The future workplace is here, and as we've seen, it's more flexible than ever. Much of this flexibility concerns how employees do their job and get rewarded for it, but it ultimately rests on a technology foundation. An ever-increasing diversity of technology products and services is coming on the market to support the workplace of the future. A big piece of the puzzle is cloud-hosting for your accounting software.

Cloud hosting enables you to bring the full power of your desktop QuickBooks to an anytime, anywhere remote environment. This is more than a simple cosmetic change: it means you can build a technology foundation for your modern firm that will support you no matter how your workplace evolves in the coming years. Your employees and clients can collaborate on files through the cloud. No more going back and forth between your office and your clients' locations to retrieve files. You'll always be working on the most up-to-date version of a file no matter where you're located or when you log in.

If you're not sure where to start, we recommend Swizznet's cloud hosting service. Swizznet is built from the ground up with accountants' needs in mind. Our servers have bank-grade security so you can always rest easy, knowing your clients' files are safe. Best of all, we recently added CrowdStrike protection, so you benefit from the full protection and speed of CrowdStrike's Falcon threat detection platform. And coming soon, superior endpoint device protection powered by CrowdStrike will be available for both company-owned and employee-owned devices.

Swizznet is committed to empowering your business evolution and future workplace through innovative technology. To learn more about Swizznet, [contact us](#) or call us at (855) 758-3677.