

Remote Work to Remain—But Only for Some

Companies Say Remote Work Making It Harder to Keep Employees

TORONTO, Aug. 11, 2021 – More than half of Canadian companies will allow existing employees to work remotely, even after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, but most employers will only offer it to employees meeting certain criteria, according to a new survey from The Harris Poll, commissioned by Express Employment Professionals.

The survey found 54% of companies will allow existing employees to continue to work remotely. Of those companies, 2 in 5 (42%) will allow all existing employees to work remotely even after the COVID-19 pandemic is over. But the majority (58%) will use criteria to determine which employees can work remotely and which cannot.

The most common decision criterion cited by far is job responsibilities (i.e. functions that can be completed away from the physical workspace) at 74%. Other common criteria include: meeting key performance indicators (KPIs) at 34%, geographic location (i.e. those who live farthest away from their physical workplace) at 29% and job title/level at 27%.



The survey also found that 39% of companies say that allowing employees to work remotely helped their company stay operational during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But now that lockdowns have ended in many areas, the ability of some employees to “work from anywhere” has caused increased competition to recruit and retain talent, as employers must now compete with companies outside of their local area. Indeed, half (51%) of Canadian hiring decision-makers surveyed say the rise in remote work is making it more difficult to attract and retain employees.

Hanif Hemani, managing director of the Express franchise in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, says, while remote work is here to stay for some, most employees will eventually return to their physical workplace, even if not every day of the week.

“Many employees have indicated they want to eventually return to their physical workplace, and most employers want that, as well,” he said. “But a lot of those employees want to return on a hybrid basis, in which they would spend part of the week at work, and part of it working remotely.”

Hemani says most companies that can accommodate remote work are using productivity goals or KPIs to determine whether employees can continue working remotely.

Curtis Debogorski, an Express franchise owner in Red Deer, Alberta, is seeing the same trends in his area. But he says companies are asking who wants to work from home first, before putting criteria in place for their employees.

“Many job seekers appear to prefer face-to-face interaction on a daily basis and to be back in the workplace full-time,” he said. “However, variables such as commuting distance, childcare/family care and technology available have caused many others to prefer remote work.”

Both Hemani and Debogorski agree that companies that can and do offer remote work will have an edge when it comes to attracting and retaining talent. Hemani notes that younger generations, especially Generation Z, prefer remote work.

“The opportunity to work remotely will be an option offered, if possible, by employers to help further distinguish themselves as an employer of choice,” he said. “Some employees are even willing to take a small pay cut for the opportunity to work from home.”

According to Debogorski, job seekers are looking for employers who are flexible and open to accommodating their personal circumstances.

“The pandemic has created a unique hiring scenario in that competitors who pull out all the stops (offering remote/flex hours, signing bonuses, etc.) put pressure on other companies to do the same and are making it more difficult generally to recruit and retain talent,” Debogorski said. “Companies that are flexible in offering a hybrid work schedule would have the edge in attracting talent based on the implied openness to accommodate personal preference or circumstance.”

Until the labor market begins to settle at some point and the COVID-19 pandemic retreats, companies may have to offer employee flexibility to entice candidates to join their workforce, Express CEO Bill Stoller said.

“Not every job allows employees to work from home, but we are seeing workers readily seek new opportunities that do offer this benefit,” he added. “It will be interesting in the next few years to see the permanent impact COVID-19 will have on the future of work, including where work is performed.”

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between March 23 and April 12, 2021, among 505 Canadian hiring decision-makers (defined as adults ages 18+ in Canada who are employed full-time or self-employed, work at companies with more than 1 employee, and have full/significant involvement in hiring decisions at their company). Data were weighted where necessary by company size to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Ana Curic at (613) 858-2622 or email ana@mapleleafstrategies.com.

About Bill Stoller

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment Professionals. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the international staffing company has more than 830 franchises in the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Since inception, Express has put more than 9 million people to work worldwide.

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