

Tempe Embraces Remote Work: A New Era for Employees and Employers

By: Cecilia Defino

In Tempe, AZ, remote work has become more prevalent since the COVID pandemic in 2020. Studies support the growing trend of remote work in Tempe, revealing a positive affect in both employee engagement and productivity.

Before the COVID pandemic, the number of people who primarily worked from home was 5.7%, or roughly 9 million people, according to the United States Census Bureau. Now, according to the new 2021 American Community Survey, the number of people working from home is 17.9%, or 27.6 million people. Between 2019 and 2021, the numbers tripled.

As of June 30, 2024, 42% of the Arizona workforce works remotely, according to Arizona's Connected Workforce. For people who live in the Phoenix area, over 20% of employees work from home.

Tempe's thriving business landscape has led to many companies implementing remote work for their employees. Tempe is home to many manufacturing operations, corporate headquarters, and is a leading choice for major corporations in Advanced Business Services, according to Tempe.gov.

Many employees appreciate the option to work remotely, specifically at the company, Solari. Solari is a non-profit that offers crisis and human services. It is located in Tempe and it allows employees to work fully remote or hybrid, making their work schedule flexible.

"Like many companies which transitioned to a remote workforce with the pandemic, Solari was pleasantly surprised to find that productivity remained constant," said Thomas Bond, the Senior Director of Communications, Marketing, and Education. "This has motivated leadership to continue allowing employees the option to work from home."

Bond said that the only challenge the company faced with remote work was that it was a challenge to quickly equip their workforce to being remote. He emphasized though that employees have enjoyed the freedom and flexibility of working from home.

"To maintain employee engagement and our award-winning work culture, we schedule regular virtual and in-person events with our teams," said Bond.

While Bond highlights the efforts Solari makes in maintaining employee engagement and productivity, there are also many psychological benefits to working remotely.

In a research article by Rachel Balven, a Clinical Assistant Professor at the WP Carey School of Business at ASU, she talks about how working from home can strengthen bonds between coworkers. The classes she teaches are geared more towards the management side of organizations and the psychology behind understanding people at work.

According to Balven's article from the Harvard Business Review, many companies such as Starbucks, Walmart, and Amazon have called employees back into the office, with some mandating a five-day-a-week work schedule. Balven said it is an "interesting paradox" between companies believing that working in person is much more beneficial, when really her research shows that working remotely may be more effective.

"Companies are trying to bring employees back and I'm sure they're giving valid reasons why, but there are also opportunities to really intimately get to know people that you work with in ways that you would actually not know," said Balven.

Balven acknowledged that collaboration and team building is beneficial to employees when they are in person. She said that "people feel good about being around other people."

"When I see that in somebody that I'm working with, it makes me view them as more human, as authentic, and it makes me want to have a better relationship with them", said Balven when talking about seeing someone's home environment in a zoom call.

As Balven discusses the positive effects of working remotely, such as coworkers feeling more connected to one another, the rise of remote work has caused economic consequences, particularly in housing markets. With more employees working from home, the demand for larger homes or moving has increased housing prices.

According to Bankrate, remote jobs in Phoenix have caused a surge in home prices, with a 62% increase since May 2020. In a recent survey from Bankrate, buyers were ready to make sacrifices to find affordable housing, and 37% were willing to move to a different state.

Even though COVID is not as relevant as it was, the demand for remote work has not gone down. In a recent report from Zippia about remote work statistics, 27% of U.S. employees continue to work remotely as of 2023. By 2025, it is expected that more than 36 million American employees will be working remotely.

Whether employees are working remotely voluntarily or not, 40% of remote workers believe they've been more productive while working at home rather than in an office. Not only does remote work raise productivity, but 50% of employees believe remote work reduces absenteeism, according to Zippia.

Another company in Tempe that transitioned to remote work has referred to the shift as an “excellent quality of life upgrade.” Kurt Pena, an employee in Client Advisory Services at Silicon Valley Bank goes off of Balven’s point on how one can grow a more intimate relationship with coworkers when working from home. It was an adjustment at first, but Pena described how working remotely only made it more exciting to see coworkers when it was in office days.

“At first it was ‘weird’ to adjust to doing cases in pajamas, but overall we were able to get software and hardware needed to adapt to remote life,” said Pena. “Our in office days in turn are nothing but positivity because those are the days that we actually get to see each other and catch up in person.”

Another thing they needed to do to adjust to working remotely was having the right equipment, and Pena said the company provides him and the other employees all the equipment needed to operate at home.

“This includes the office chair, extra monitor, laptop, and the desk. I am pretty fortunate to have been given these benefits before the company was bought out!” said Pena.

At Silicon Valley Bank, the effects of remote work on productivity have been very positive. He found that employees are just happier to engage because they are in their own comfortable space. This allows them to focus more on the tasks at hand, he said.

Productivity is the one thing that is a big challenge for the company. Pena said that bosses can’t exactly ‘see’ you, so they resort to using metrics and statistics to generate employee productivity. He said that is the only downside to working remote.

“You can be a great person and mean well, but if your statistics aren’t matching up to your story, it’s going to be hard for them to vouch for you,” said Pena. “The managers at my work are absolutely incredible to work with though, and they definitely try to help you get your metrics up before they start really resorting to tougher tactics.”

As remote work continues to reshape the business landscape in Tempe and other areas, it is clear that working remotely has brought both challenges and opportunities. Employees, like Kurt Pena, have found that working from home allows them to be more focused and productive all while being in a comfortable environment.

The future of work in Tempe and across the country is adapting more and more to working hybrid or remotely. As many believe that working from home is unfavorable, some people such as Rachel Balven believe it can connect people in ways we have never thought of. Employees and companies are learning to embrace this new work culture for the future.

Sources:

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