# Entrepreneur

# How to Create Much-Needed Structure for Your Remote Workforce

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The start of the new year is the time where we, as business owners, re-energize our business plans and try to improve in every area of the business.  One important area to evaluate is employee productivity. And one simple way to improve here is by creating *structure* for your workforce.

I am constantly surprised at the number of colleagues and friends who assume that a business operating from all parts of the globe means a free wheeling structure designed to "foster creativity."

In fact, it's the complete opposite. Because virtual companies already operate without a central physical location, it is even more critical to have structures and disciplines in place to have a smooth, integrated and effective workforce.

Below are our best tips for creating a framework for a productive team.

## Establish fixed working hours and stick to them.

When we first started our business, we hired a few people who convinced us they worked best at night, without a fixed schedule or plan. Having just left big corporations where a strict 9-to-5 schedule was the norm, we agreed to accommodate this, wanting our workforce to be empowered in both their work and time. And while allowing every employee to work whenever they wanted may have served their needs, it didn't serve the needs of co-workers, customers or the company. This is what we learned about schedules while still embracing the virtual remote culture.

Routine is your friend in a virtual business. There are enough distractions in the day-to-day home-office environment and adding another decision point just makes for a distracted team. Not to say you can't take your employee's *preferred schedules* into consideration. For instance, if they know their focus is best achieved from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., this could be acceptable based on their daily tasks. And while flexibility is a key attraction for remote employees, the first goal should always be achieving the company's goals. The most important thing is that once agreed upon, those "flexible" hours become their formal work hours. Structure and accountability will be key to your success -- and theirs too.

## Document, document, document!

A high performing business is one that operates predictably, consistently and where all work is done with the same quality

standard, regardless of who is executing. This isn't easy, but we make sure that all of our day-to-day processes are documented by using standard operating procedures (SOPs).

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When people sit next to each other in an office, it's easy to ask someone for a reminder on how to perform a specific task. In a virtual context, often people who are unsure will attempt to "wing it," especially if there is a deadline involved. For us, by having detailed SOPs, we ensure that every member of our team spends his or her time completing tasks the same way -- with accuracy and efficiency -- rather than wasting time trying to figure it out and creating bumps in the outcomes.

Before we sign-off on SOPs, we have someone in the company follow the directions step by step, confirming that any team member could easily perform these exact processes when needed.

## Provide decision-making criteria but leave a lot of wiggle room

For all business functions, maintain a set of decision-making criteria that specifically states when you want a team member to make a decision on their own or when they need to consult a more senior worker. The important thing here is providing the framework you expect to keep the structure intact.

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