

Chicago Tribune

What employers look for in remote workers

By **Marcel Schwantes**

Picture this: You're pregnant with your second child and you need income. You apply for jobs, but you strike out because flexible work options are few and far between.

Sara Sutton Fell knows this feeling all too well. She founded FlexJobs for this reason. As a working mom who is passionate about improving lives through flexible work options, her company serves remote workers, digital nomads and people who want more work/life balance or who just want to escape the office. As part of FlexJobs, she started Remote.co, a resource for companies looking for tips, best practices and support about remote work and virtual teams.

Remote.co recently asked several startups this question: What traits do you look for in candidates for a remote job? Here are some answers that stood out:

GitHub, Inc. (Online project hosting using Git)

Written communication: When you're remote, a majority of the way you interface with the world will be through written word.

Discipline: Working well autonomously, being self-motivated enough to stay productive without someone looking over your shoulder.

Decisiveness: Time zones are tricky, and it's often necessary for remote employees to make decisions with imperfect information, even if the right person isn't around in the moment to make the decision themselves.

Beutler Ink (digital content development agency)

Anyone who writes a clear, well-presented note and includes all the requested enclosures with their application is going to get our attention. A confused (or confusing!) application email, with missing enclosures (no CV or cover letter) is a sign that an applicant is not going to follow written instruction well and is not going to give clear updates on project status.

Automattic (web development)

We look for people who are self-starters/have a high degree of independence, value continuous learning and are receptive to feedback. If during the trial process a candidate needs a lot of hand holding and waits for specific instructions before moving forward on work, he or she probably won't be a good fit.

Greenback Expat Tax Services (expat tax services for U.S. expats)

The discipline trait is obviously critical because there is no day-to-day monitoring of their activities. We have to trust that they are doing their job

and that distractions are minimized during working hours, and that takes discipline.

LoveToKnow (online media)

One trait I look for is great communications skills. We stay productive by staying in touch, offering status reports, working through challenges, and these things are all easier when everyone is communicative.

The Cheat Sheet (modern man's premium lifestyle site)

Someone who is accustomed to having a huge part of their social life come from work can raise a red flag. We lean toward candidates who love to travel, value having a flexible lifestyle or have worked remotely in the past.

CloudPeeps (talent matching service for professional freelancers)

I look to see if a candidate has freelanced or worked independently in the past. I also look for someone who's been through a redundancy or period of change and uncertainty. These qualities build up a deep resilience and mature career mindset.

Groove (help desk software development)

Candidates must have experience working remotely or running their own business. They have to have already built the accountability and productivity skills required for remote work.

Simple [A] (distributed technology consulting and training company)

People who do not need step-by-step guidance or a single well-defined job or limited set of responsibilities work well. You are proactive, even heroic, fundamentally honest and can communicate well with the team through the day.

TeamGantt (project scheduling software)

They should be good self-starters who don't need to be micromanaged. It's extremely hard to micromanage remotely and not something that we want to have to do.

Teleport (global team building software for digital nomads)

We have a strong bias for people who have proven remote collaboration experience (if not full-time work then even as freelancers, participating in international communities, etc.). And also we have bias for people who have lived in multiple countries and cities. This way you can at least know they can appreciate basic things like time zones and long-distance communication tricks.

World Wide Web Hosting (web hosting and cloud services)

We've found that it is imperative to find candidates who have a social foundation outside of work. People that rely on work for this tend to be unsuccessful in remote positions, so we focus on finding people who gain their social side of life from other avenues.

Balsamiq (wireframing and mock-up tool with a high focus on usability)

Previous work-at-home experience is a plus, especially if they've done it for a long time. Working at home is amazing for the first six months, great for the first two years and can be tough after that unless you come up with your system for separating work from personal life.

Go Fish Digital (digital marketing agency)

One thing we've found is that the more entrepreneurial-spirited candidates tend to have a harder time focusing on the tasks at hand when working remotely. I think the nature of remote work gives a sense of freedom, as it should. However, that freedom to someone who wants to run their own business can translate into them spending more time doing their own thing.

Marcel Schwantes is the principal and founder of Leadership From the Core.