Recruiting and retaining remote workers:

The top soft skills every virtual employee needs

SKILLSURVEY

The COVID-19 pandemic has remade much of the nation's reality, and in this new world organizations are rushing to remake or invent new strategies to recruit, hire and manage remote workers. When the crisis began, many states imposed stay-at-home orders for non-frontline workers. Institutions suddenly needed to manage a flood of employees operating from home offices, kitchens and dining rooms. Now, even before the pandemic is history, many are implementing permanent work-at-home policies for at least some of their workforce. And hiring organizations have added new soft-skill requirements to their list of must-haves for candidates, among them self-motivation, focus and discipline, and an ability to proactively stay connected with supervisors and team members. This e-book discusses what makes excellent remote workers—and the most effective way to find them.

Is remote work here to stay?

In recent years, advances in Internet connectivity and tools like videoconferencing have driven the rise in remote work. There is even a new term "virtual nomad" for individuals who travel from place to place while working remotely. Before the COVID-19 crisis, nearly 15% of U.S. workers were operating remotely, at least part of the week, says a June 2020 MIT Sloan Management Review (MIT SMR) article. By the first half of April, however, 50% of all U.S. employees were working remotely every day.

In PwC's June 2020 US Remote Work Survey, 25% of 120 U.S. executives reported that, before the pandemic, "many" employees (anywhere from 30% to 59% of their workforce) worked remotely at least one day a week. Another 39% said "most" (60% - 100%) worked at least one day from home. After the pandemic began, a combined 98% reported that many or most employees worked at least one day remotely.

And going forward? An overwhelming majority of business leaders in the PwC survey, 89%, project many or most will remain remote workers.

Do remote workers want to return to their offices?[1]

25%
say 'yes'

26%
want to stay put for the time being but return once the restrictions are lifted

49%
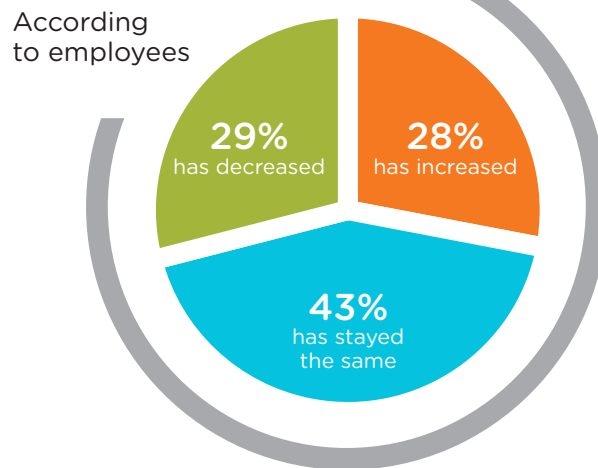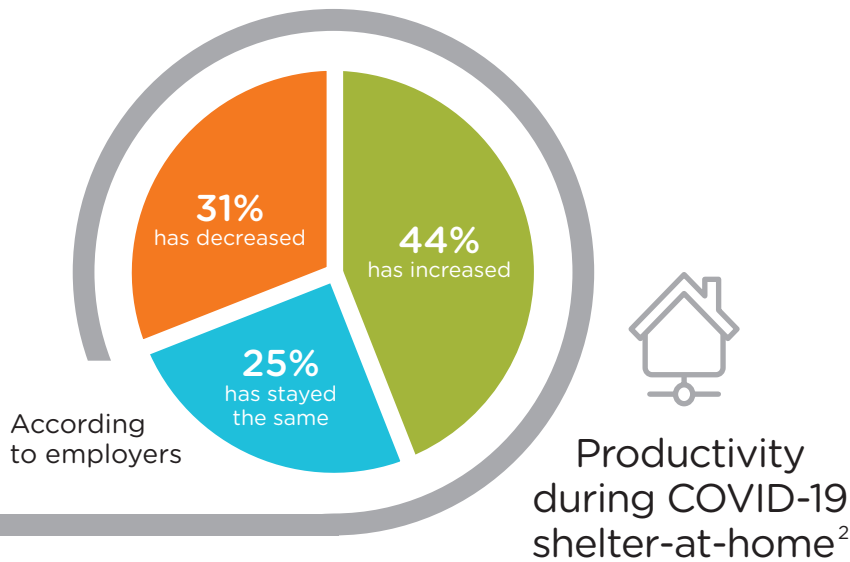wish to remain remote

SKILLSURVEY

Find the best remote workers

Working offsite has helped keep employees healthy. But it presents hurdles to organizations with little or no experience managing them. For example, it's the employer's job to provide remote workers with up-to-date technology needed to do their jobs; motivate them to meet deadlines and collaborate with team members; provide flexibility in work hours; and help manage workloads.

When it comes to recruiting and hiring, finding new employees with the right soft skills is often difficult because not everyone is experienced working remotely. But even candidates with little or no experience often possess the skills needed to be successful remote workers.

Organizations are increasingly seeking these soft skills when recruiting and hiring remote workers:

1. Ability to work independently and manage time effectively
2. Ability to communicate and collaborate well with others
3. Tech savvy
4. Self-motivated and takes initiative

Productivity during COVID-19 shelter-at-home[2]

According to employers

31% has decreased

44% has increased

25% has stayed the same

According to employees

29% has decreased

28% has increased

43% has stayed the same

SKILLSURVEY

1. Ability to work independently and manage time effectively

Employees have different work styles. Some need regular interaction and structured scheduling created by supervisors to ensure they're headed down the right track. Others prefer to manage their own time to ensure deadlines are met and work is completed promptly. There's no right or wrong, but it's important that you understand the candidate's ability to work independently if that's part of their remote work role.

Distractions for remote workers[3]

32% of remote workers polled – even many of those with children – said social media is their #1 distraction.

On average, **they spent 2+ hours per day dealing with distractions**, including children and other adults at home, pets, and traditional and social media.
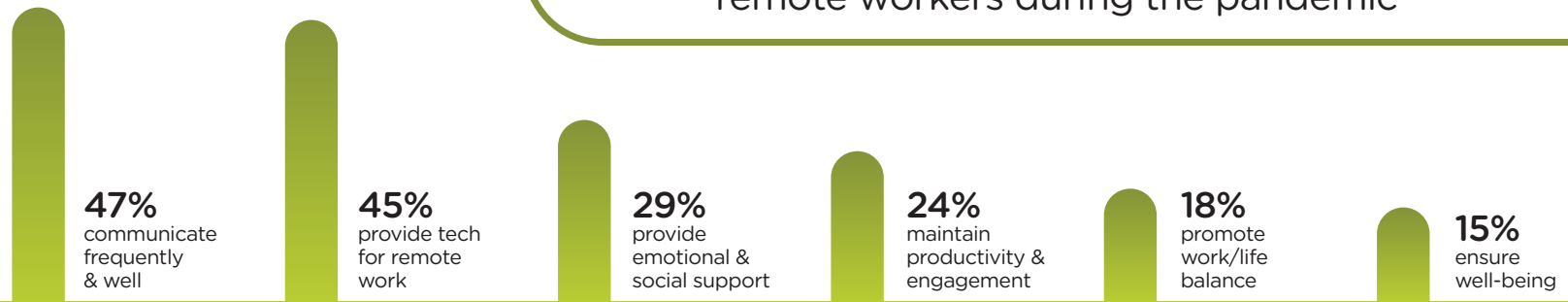
SKILLSURVEY

2. Ability to communicate and collaborate well with others

It's important to know if job candidates can communicate clearly and efficiently to keep operations running as normal. Today's remote worker has many tools (chat, video conference, email, phone) at their fingertips to communicate. But working from home also comes with distractions. For example, during video conferences, your candidates must be able to listen attentively and ask key questions needed to keep meetings on track. And don't underrate candidates' sociability. Cut off from others' physical presence, it's important that remote workers demonstrate how they build rapport with their fellow team members.

How employers have supported remote workers during the pandemic[4]

47%
communicate frequently & well

45%
provide tech for remote work

29%
provide emotional & social support

24%
maintain productivity & engagement

18%
promote work/life balance

15%
ensure well-being

SKILLSURVΞY

3. Tech savvy

Look for candidates who have proven skills hosting web or video-conference meetings, using online collaboration and document-sharing tools, conducting group chats and teleconferences. Candidates who are adept at using and learning the technologies that are required for the job role, and those that are needed for effective virtual communications. For example remote workers will be If an issue arises, can they react and troubleshoot to either fix the issue themselves or get help for fast resolution? If they have no experience, are they self-motivated and good at learning on their own?

SKILLSURVEY

4. Self-motivated and takes initiative

You want to make sure your candidates are willing and able to take initiative to apply creative solutions to any problems they encounter. Remote workers have no onsite managers, so they will need to independently manage their own time and exercise judgment to prioritize work and meet deadlines. Ask references about your candidates' abilities to independently solve issues. They should also demonstrate proficiency at reaching out for help, especially to address technology hiccups. And since the future of work continues to speed up, you'll want to ensure your candidates have a history of exhibiting flexibility and can adapt to new processes and technology.

How collaboration impacts productivity[5]

39% of remote workers said difficulty collaborating was the top reason for being unproductive while sheltering in place.

38% attributed a fall in productivity to balancing work with home duties, e.g. childcare.

SKILLSURVEY

Reference checks:
The best indicator of
remote workers' success

A SkillSurvey study of organizations' top candidate sourcing and screening strategies found 55% assessed candidates' skills. Another 53% sought feedback from candidates' references with 30% of those using online reference checking solutions.

The pandemic has fueled "remote recruiting" and the adoption of more of recruiting technologies like online reference checking and post-hire solutions.

What talent leaders say[6]

88%

Completing reference checks before extending a job offer is "important" or very "important."

79%

Using scientifically valid tools to gain insight into fit for the role is "important" or very "important."

SKILLSURVƎY

Online reference checks

Today's hiring realities require organizations to seek out more ways to assess their job candidates without in-person interviews. The most efficient method: web-based technology that references use to rate a candidate's skills and behaviors via job-specific surveys designed by industrial and organizational (I/O) psychologists.

At least 85% of references who receive SkillSurvey Reference® online surveys complete them and, references can access surveys 24/7 on any device via a link in an email (or via text message) from someone they know – the candidate. Most references return feedback in just a day or two – a marked contrast to the time-consuming process of using traditional telephone-based queries that can be inconsistent and rarely provide deep insights on job candidates' specific soft skills.

Take a coffee break and learn more:

This 15-minute webinar shares more about assessing the soft skills for building a remote workforce.

Watch OnDemand

SKILLSURVEY®

Assessing a candidate's ability to work remotely

To help organizations boost their ability to hire the best and brightest remote workers, SkillSurvey has enhanced its Pre-Hire 360 workflow surveys within SkillSurvey Reference® to focus on remote work skills with a new "Ability to Work Remotely Cluster." Now, candidate reports include the skills critical for remote work organized together in this cluster – along with an average of the corresponding ratings from references. This helps recruiters zero in on these important soft skills to make the best hiring decisions for remote-based roles and that helps reduce turnover.

	MANAGERS ONLY	ALL REFERENCES	CAUTION	TARGET		
Ability to Work Remotely **Average Numeric Rating by References**	**R**				6.53	6.56
a) Demonstrate dependability (e.g., report consistently, and on time, for work, appointments, and meetings)	1				6.75	6.80
b) Plan, execute, and manage work in a disciplined and organized way	1				6.50	6.60
c) Use basic technology as a tool for communication (e.g., email, scheduling appointments, etc.)	3				6.50	6.40
d) Consistently meet or exceed goals	1				6.50	6.60

Sample of feedback from references on a candidate's Ability to Work Remotely (AbWR) that is reported in a reference feedback report. Candidates with high AbWR cluster ratings were more likely to have references who would work with them again in the future according to a SkillSurvey study of 40,000 candidates reference checked in Jan-June 2020,

SKILLSURVƎY®

Checking the pulse early and often to engage remote workers

Even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond is making sure that the great employees you hire, thrive and stay with your organization. With a post-hire engagement and analytics solution, like SkillSurvey Post-Hire™, you can do just that. Measure each stage of the employee lifecycle with an all-in-one solution so you can automate, confidential surveys that help you get candid, ongoing feedback.

— **Recruiting and hiring**: Evaluate candidate experience and hiring manager satisfaction

— **Onboarding**: Measure employee experience - make sure you're setting new employees up for success.

— **First+ year of employment**: Measure both employee engagement and job satisfaction and job fit via supervisor feedback. Check-in at 30, 60 or 90+ days or set your own schedule.

— **At employee exit**: Uncover the root causes of turnover. Analyze your employee exit data alongside real-time satisfaction insights, trend analysis over time and pinpoint challenges or areas of opportunity.

SKILLSURVEY

Conclusion: Rely on science & tech to find and retain outstanding remote workers

Hiring remote workers is a necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic. And many predict that, even after the crisis, organizations will continue to grow their ranks of remote workers. Yes, there are challenges to recruiting and hiring in this environment. But automated online solutions like SkillSurvey Reference and SkillSurvey Post-Hire with scientifically designed surveys are helping organizations find, engage, and retain the best talent.

SKILLSURVEY

At SkillSurvey, we believe talent determines the success or failure of every organization. With the best people in the right positions, your company or institution can achieve amazing things. That's why we make it quick and easy to get meaningful, predictive insights on a candidate's soft skills and past performance from their references — and infuse those insights across your talent stack. Contact SkillSurvey today to get started finding—and keeping—the best talent for any kind of role.

www.skillsurvey.com

SKILLSURVEY