



WOMEN BUSINESS LEADERS FORUM

DENVER, CO
BROWN PALACE HOTEL



JUNE 5-8 2017



ASPPA

Making Retirement Plans Work

Part of the American Retirement Association

A dark blue silhouette of a city skyline is visible at the bottom of the page.

General Session 5: **The Yin and Yang of Remote Employees**

Panelists:

Adam Pozek, *DWC ERISA Consultants, LLC*

Norman Levinrad, *Summit Benefit & Actuarial Services, Inc.*

Sheri Alsguth, *Pinnacle Plan Design, LLC*

WOMEN BUSINESS LEADERS FORUM

**DENVER, CO
BROWN PALACE HOTEL**
JUNE 5-8 2017



Our Firms

- **DWC** – Entire workforce is remote.
- **Summit** - Blend of dispersed and in-office staff and people who do both, i.e. some are local but sometimes work from home rather than come to the office.
- **Pinnacle** – Blend of employees completely remote, employees in a second office, and the remaining team is in one main office, but nearly all administrators work remotely at least 1-2 days a week

“Remote” Employees

- Why do we even use this term?
- You just have employees. Why define them differently?
- Treat your remote employees the same as your on-site employees with respect to:
 - Flexibility in work schedules
 - How you measure success
 - Rewards and incentives
 - How/what you communicate internally.
 - Do you do anything extra to ensure the success of a remote worker that you do not do for your on-site employees?

Why Remote Employees?

- Technology has allowed it.
- Employer Benefits:
 - Access to expanded talent pool (versus your narrow geographical area)
 - Lower turnover
 - Less turnover due to employee geographical relocations.
 - Several studies show turnover is actually decreased with a remote workforce

Why Remote Employees?

- Employee Benefits:
 - No commutes
 - Increases flexibility
 - Allows employees to manage family situations more easily for example getting kids to school, sports etc.
 - Allows employees flexibility to manage non-work interests
 - Less expensive for employees (no dress code or vehicle costs)
 - Many employees love it.

Technology Requirements

- Robust IT structure
 - **DWC**
 - Works with an outside IT consulting firm
 - **Summit**
 - Outsources to an outside IT firm who provides infrastructure and managed support.
 - **Pinnacle**
 - Shares an IT team of 5 full time employees with parent CPA firm
- High Speed Internet
 - All remote employees must have high speed internet.
 - Decision to make: Do you pay for it?

Technology Requirements

- Paperless office
 - You must have a fully paperless office with archival and retrieval capabilities.
- Phone System
 - VoIP phone system
 - Challenging with a large remote staff.
 - Integrated screen sharing, conference calling, IM

Technology Requirements

- Various opinions on remote desktop arrangements:
 - **DWC**
 - All software is the same.
 - **Summit**
 - Everyone must work the same way regardless of in-office or remote location.
 - **Pinnacle**
 - If it is more efficient for our in-office folks to not work on remote desktop, they are not required to do so

Technology Requirements

- Hardware

- Summit

- IT staff sets up and sends hardware to remote employees.
 - Protocols in place to track hardware inventory and have returned if employee leaves.

- DWC

- Bring your own device model - hardware belongs to the employees.

- Pinnacle

- IT staff sets up and sends hardware to remote employees.
 - Employees sign equipment agreements so there are clear processes in place to track hardware inventory and have returned if employee leaves.

Technology Requirements

- Workflow Software

- DWC

- Cloud-based workflow system to track deliverables, deadlines, workloads, etc.

- Summit

- Uses Microsoft Office task manager to manage workflow.

- Pinnacle

- Cloud-based workflow system to track deliverables, deadlines, workloads, etc.

Server Considerations

- Where are servers housed?
 - On site or in the cloud?
- What happens if server site is compromised?
 - Establish back up systems.
 - How fast can you be up and running if your server site is destroyed in a disaster?
 - What is the worst that can happen and how are you equipped to handle that?

Security

- **DWC**

- Access through VPN
- Two-factor authentication and complex passwords
- Screen saver with password lock
- Ransomware triggers embedded in all drives
- Employees are subject to confidentiality clauses
- No information can be stored locally
- All reports have SSNs masked

Security

- Summit

- Nothing can ever be saved on a remote computer
- All information must be always on main server.
- “Thin client” computers to force this.
- Shredders at all remote locations so anything printed out is shredded.

Security

- Pinnacle

- Procedures are the same for all staff members, regardless of location.
- Shares a full-time cyber security IT professional who works on securing the network from attacks and breaches.
- Any information downloads above a certain size and/or at a frequent level are monitored.
- All employees are subject to confidentiality clauses.
- All remote employees have a shredder.

A Physical Office

- Potential Advantages:
 - Training – Easier to train new employees
 - Culture – Easier to maintain a company culture?
 - Collaboration – Does it facilitate team work?
 - Management – Easier for managers to more clearly monitor productivity and performance?
 - If yes, how?
 - If no, why not?
- **Are these myths?**

No Physical Office At All

- Would you lose any of the “so-called” advantages with a fully remote office a la **DWC**? How do you maintain cohesion?
 - Frequent meetings via web software
 - No differentiation between in office and remote employees

Employer Challenges/Considerations

- EE compensation:
 - Depending on firm philosophy, pay may or may not be affected by geographic considerations. This can hurt or can help.
- More competition for talent:
 - Every employee of yours can be hired by every other TPA with remote capacity. This forces you to keep your staff happy.
- No local contact:
 - Do clients care that their consultant/administrator is not local?
 - Do you care if you have only virtual contact with your employees?
- Training
 - Discussed later, more difficult to train remotely.

Is Remote For All Firms?

- No
 - If you don't have the technology in place, no.
 - You need to have trust in your employees. If you don't, no.
 - You need to have a culture that embraces change and technology. If you don't, no.

Is Remote For All Employees?

- No
 - Clearly some people can't work outside an office.
 - Sometimes they only know once they have tried it.
 - Some employees cannot handle the distractions.
 - Some employees cannot 'turn it off'.

Hiring

- How do you manage a hiring process remotely?
 - Initial phone call (all three firms)
 - Skype interview (all three firms)
 - Web tools for testing (DWC)
 - Show writing skills (Summit)
 - Personality assessments (Pinnacle and DWC)
 - No in-person interviews (Summit and DWC)
 - In-person final interviews (Pinnacle)

Training

- All agree, it is more difficult to train people who are remote, but it can be managed.
 - **DWC**
 - All training is done by Skype

Training

- All agree, it is more difficult to train people who are remote, but it can be managed.
 - Summit
 - Entry level staff must spend their first year in the Eugene office for training.
 - Experienced hires spend 2 weeks for orientation in Eugene then go fully remote.

Training

- All agree, it is more difficult to train people who are remote, but it can be managed.
 - Pinnacle
 - No entry level staff are completely remote.
 - New experienced hires spend 1-2 weeks for orientation in Arizona then go fully remote.
 - New employees return to the office quarterly (in year one for a week each time) and then come to AZ 1-2 times per year.
 - Much training is done via screen sharing/virtual conferencing.
 - Remote employees participate in in-house trainings via Skype.

Questions?



WOMEN BUSINESS LEADERS FORUM

DENVER, CO
BROWN PALACE HOTEL
JUNE 5-8 2017

