

Recruiting During and After the Coronavirus Pandemic

Among the many challenges COVID-19 presents to companies in German-American business are its effects on their workforces. Many companies have downsized their teams in response to the pandemic, thereby creating potential vacancies that may need to be filled and trained for once business accelerates. Moreover, most companies have amended their HR policies and day-to-day working practices to keep their remaining employees healthy and safe. Travel bans and visa restrictions have further complicated staffing plans.

While the fight against COVID-19 continues, there are promising signs of steady improvement in the US economy overall. According to the most recent figures released by the *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, total non-farm payroll employment rose by 1.8 million in July, marking the third straight month of job gains¹. As the economy continues to improve and companies plan to hire for key openings, they should keep in mind the pandemic's general impact on the employment market.

Especially for professional roles, expectations related to work-from-home (WFH) policies and employee benefits have shifted. Furthermore, recruitment and onboarding processes have gone virtual and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future. In order to attract and retain top talent, it is important for companies in German-American business to adapt to this “new normal” in their recruitment approach as well as in their HR policies in general. The Recruiting Services team at the German American Chamber of Commerce of the Midwest is always available to support you with these efforts.

Following are some key topics to help you prepare for recruiting during and after the pandemic.

Work-from-Home (WFH) is Here to Stay

Arguably the biggest impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the US employment market has been the dramatic increase in professional employees who work remotely, either wholly or partially. This includes functions such as Sales and Marketing, Administration, Finance/Accounting, and Human Resources. WFH policies are also frequently connected with more flexible working hours, making them particularly attractive for employees.

Per a comprehensive survey by Global Workplace Analytics, 88% of North American office workers worked from home at least one day per week since the start of the pandemic (and 77% did so full-time), whereas only one-third of professional workers telecommuted on a regular basis prior to COVID-19. Looking forward, 76% of survey respondents

¹ “Employment Situation Summary.” *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 7 Aug. 2020, www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm.



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desire to work at least partially from home after the Coronavirus pandemic is over, with the majority wishing to balance their working time roughly equally between the office and WFH (while another 16% want to continue with 100% WFH)².

Given these findings, companies competing for top talent for professional positions will need to accommodate the increased desire for WFH options wherever feasible. Fortunately for employers, the aforementioned Global Workplace Analytics survey and other studies have also found that WFH did not negatively affect workforce productivity and that it even had desirable knock-off effects related to increased employee well-being, operational cost reductions, and improved organizational sustainability. A recent survey of global CEOs conducted by The Conference Board on the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their companies' workforces illustrates that upper management recognizes these shifts in employee expectations – the top two impacts cited were “adopt new work policies to include more flexible work hours” (35.1%, rank #1) and “increase the number of employees who can work remotely on a permanent basis” (32.8%, rank #2)³.

Should your company decide that offering WFH and/or flexible working hours is a viable strategy to attract and retain professional employees, make sure to:

- Create/update your Employee Handbook with WFH/flexible working policies prior to starting the recruiting process.
- Clearly articulate the core aspects of company WFH policies when advertising open positions, both in job descriptions and during the interview process.
- Ensure that WFH-suitable IT systems and other tools are available for new hires (e.g. video conferencing software, phone systems with international calling, ergonomic workstations, etc.)
- Modify hiring processes to evaluate whether a candidate possesses the requisite “soft skills” for successful WFH, such as resourcefulness, autonomy, self-motivation, proactive collaboration and written and verbal communication abilities.⁴
- Provide training to supervisors regarding effective management of remote employees.

² Kamouri, Anita, and Kate Lister. Global Workplace Analytics, 2020, *Global Work-from-Home Experience Survey Report (2020)*, globalworkplaceanalytics.com.

³ “COVID-19's Long-Term Impact on the Workforce: More Flexible Hours and Remote Work.” *COVID-19 Coronavirus Implications for Business*, The Conference Board, 2020, conference-board.org/covid-19.

⁴ Macri, Jill, and Clay Kellogg. “Four Strategies for Effective Leadership during Uncertain Times.” *Terminal*, Terminal, 24 Apr. 2020, terminal.io/blog/four-strategies-for-effective-leadership-during-uncertain-times.



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Update Employee Benefits Strategically

The Coronavirus pandemic has also increased the significance of market-competitive employee benefits packages for attracting in-demand talent. Unsurprisingly, employer-sponsored healthcare plans have become increasingly important for candidates weighing employment options. COVID-19 has also accelerated an existing trend of employers offering holistic employee well-being plans to attract and retain employees while promoting a healthy and productive workforce. Holistic wellness programs go beyond an employee's physical health and provide resources and programming to also address their mental and financial well-being. These holistic wellness programs are particularly desired by millennial workers but can be a valuable recruitment tool for all generations active in today's workforce.

According to Katie Jablonski, Regional Sales Manager at WellRight, a leading provider of customized employee well-being programs: "During COVID-19, well-being programs have been on the minds of organizations with their employees working virtually, and struggling with their mental health as well as financial stress. These effects on our well-being will be with us even after the pandemic, and we see clients putting more of a focus on these pillars of wellness to make sure their employees are able to manage their health."⁵

Ms. Jablonski recommends that companies carefully select an appropriate technology partner to help them set up and administer their employee wellness programs and notes the importance of incorporating mobile-based solutions given the number of employees now in WFH situations. She adds, "By giving your employees activities and educational content, they can work on their wellness and gain a sense of community, even while working remotely."

Virtual Recruiting and Onboarding of New Employees

While many German-American companies were already leveraging virtual interviews before COVID-19, especially for first-round screening interviews, these have become standard during the pandemic. Most rules for in-person interviews still apply in a virtual format. However, companies should pay particular attention to the following best practices for virtual interviews during the pandemic:

- Show candidates that you are taking the interview seriously and appreciate their time; interviewers should dress appropriately, find an appropriate setting with good lighting and minimal distractions, etc.
- Test your technology platform in advance to avoid hiccups.
- Many recruiters and HR consultants recommend recording video interviews, as it is harder to read body language and other non-verbal cues in a virtual setting. Watching a recording allows hiring managers to better appreciate a candidate's level of engagement. However, you should always obtain a candidate's permission to record the interview in advance to ensure legal compliance.
- For interviews with finalist candidates, have videos ready-to-go that provide virtual tours of the office/production facility and showcase your company culture and USPs as a potential employer.

⁵ Jablonski, Katie. Telephone interview. 20 Aug. 2020.



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Companies should also ensure that they have a strategy and processes in place for virtual onboarding of new employees. Per the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), virtual onboarding “should never be a “one-and-done” video session or phone call... (but) needs to be conducted over multiple, interactive video sessions that provide an overview of the company and its products and services, and incorporates meetings with managers, team members and even business leaders like the CEO.”⁶ To this end, it is recommendable to create a series of short videos introducing topics that complement virtual sessions with supervisors, HR managers and other new colleagues. Other key recommendations include pre-configuring work tools such as laptop computers before they are sent to new employees and scheduling regular check-ins to ensure that new team members do not feel forgotten or overlooked. Finally, companies should “not ignore the social side of onboarding” and should find creative ways to make new employees feel welcome and bond them to their colleagues and the organization.

About GACC Midwest’s Recruiting Services

The Recruiting & Consulting Services Team at the German American Chamber of Commerce® of the Midwest, Inc. has extensive experience connecting German-based companies with top talent for their open positions across a broad range of industries, job functions, and seniority levels. Many of our clients are hiring their very first US employees and our team is happy to serve as trusted advisors on relevant HR topics in addition to managing all aspects of the recruiting process. We also leverage our membership network, which includes many experienced service providers, to support our clients in matters such as employee benefits and regulatory compliance. Contact us today to discuss how we can assist you in attracting the best talent for your company.

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⁶ Maurer, Roy. “Virtual Onboarding of Remote Workers More Important Than Ever.” *Shrm.org*, SHRM, 20 Apr. 2020, www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/virtual-onboarding-remote-workers.aspx.



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