

Privacy Tip #286 – Survey of Employers and Employees Find Disconnect on Remote Monitoring

Article By:

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When I conduct employee education sessions on data privacy and cybersecurity, I am often surprised that employees are unaware that their employers are legally able to monitor their use of company assets, and that employers are indeed doing just that. Although some might find this creepy, if an employee is using an employer's laptop, network or other technology, it is well known that monitoring is being done and is allowed. I tell employees that some employers are monitoring if they are sending things to their personal email account, and that they might get a call from IT or management if they send things to their personal account. Invariably, eyebrows shoot up.

An interesting [survey](#) by ExpressVPN was released recently that highlights the gap between employers' monitoring of employees' use of company assets and how it is affecting employer-employee relations. Although I could infer these result anecdotally, the survey is quite revealing and is worth a read, especially if you are a human resources manager.

The survey found that especially during the pandemic and with a remote workforce, "bosses are uneasy about remote workers' productivity." This makes sense to me, because it is difficult to monitor employees' productivity when they aren't in the office. A whopping 74 percent of bosses say that "remote work makes them feel a lack of control over their business," while 69 percent say they "feel uneasy about remote work because they can't observe employees in person." Even more disturbing is that 57 percent of bosses "don't trust their employees to work without in-person supervision" and 59 percent say that "don't trust their employees to work without digital supervision."

The survey shows that surveillance of employees has been "rapidly increasing in recent months," 78 percent of the companies surveyed reporting they are using monitoring software to track employee performance and/or online activity, and 90 percent of those companies surveyed saying they are actively tracking time spent by their employees doing work or other activities unrelated to work (like online shopping, for instance). Forty-six percent of those surveyed have terminated an employee based on remote monitoring.

On the other hand, employees are quite uneducated about the fact that they are being monitored or how. Only 53 percent of employees are aware that their employer is monitoring their communication and online activities, and one in six were completely unaware that it was even possible for employers

to monitor their communication and online activities.

Uh oh—one in three employees report that they have “used their work computer for purposes that they’d find embarrassing should their employer find out” including chats and messages, google searches, visiting job application websites, and “visiting inappropriate sites.”

Employers believe that monitoring is a way to keep work productivity and quality high, while the monitoring makes employees feel “stressed, unappreciated, and resentful.”

The bottom line is that more and more employers are implementing monitoring software, and some may not inform their employees that they are being monitored. Some employees feel so strongly about it that a majority say they would quit their job if their employers started monitoring them.

The survey results are fascinating and insightful for both employers and employees. Employers need to be able to evaluate employees’ work productivity and quality, and with a remote workforce, it is harder than ever to complete that evaluation.

On the other hand, employees need to be treated as professionals and with respect, but also need to understand the challenges employers are facing with a remote workforce and having to control the quality and volume of work being performed by employees.

Sounds like a town hall in the making—even if it is over Zoom or Teams—which, of course, can be monitored!

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