

## Telework; Getting Your Organization Started!

### Everyone Benefits from Teleworking!

A structured telework program offers businesses bottom-line returns, reduces stress on employees along with improved control over their time and the opportunity to be more productive, and reduces the number of cars in during peak-commute times and air-pollution for everyone.

You employees already telework, albeit informally. In today's work environment, very few employees actually spend most of their time in an office. Rather, they are often in meetings, on travel, in training, or visiting clients and customers. Actual occupancy of commercial office space in the U.S. between the hours of 8:00 am and 5:00 pm is only 30-50%; meaning most employees are out of the office most of the time. Many of your employees are also accessing email and work files from coffee shops and via hand-held devices as a normal part of trying to get their work done.

In addition, an increasing number of employees are working at home (teleworking) during the time when they might normally be in the office. In the Washington metropolitan region, the percentage of employees who telework increased from 11% in 2001 to nearly 20% in 2007. On average, these employees are teleworking one or two days a week.

Teleworking gives employees and managers the option of working off-site on a full-time, part-time, or even temporary basis. Furthermore, teleworking provides numerous well-documented benefits for employers and employees, as well as our society and the environment.

### Employer Benefits

Teleworking is an effective business management tool which can have numerous organizational benefits regardless of what stage of growth the organization is in or the economic environment. Some of these include:

- **Improved Employee Retention** – Employees seeking to telework realize significant personal benefits that increase employee satisfaction and employee retention. Teleworking reduces the stress that your employees experience during the commute and provides them with an “Indirect Pay Raise” by reducing their commute expenses. Employees at a Fortune 50 company that participated in a six-month telework pilot program responded to a survey that they were half as likely to seek employment elsewhere over the next three years.
- **Enhanced Employee Recruiting** – Teleworking is a flexible work arrangement highly sought by many employees. Many organizations have discovered that teleworking is a great way to attract and retain good employees. Cost savings can be significant considering that the actual cost of recruiting, hiring, and training a new employee can be up to 1.5 times the employee's salary. And, in some cases, employers have been able to expand their geographic reach by hiring employees who live in other parts of the country without having them relocate. A major University in California found that their “Time to Hire” metrics were significantly impacted when a job posting was listed as “Telework Friendly”. The cost of recruiting new employees into these positions were 28 percent lower than non-telework friendly position, the time it took to fill these positions was 31 percent lower and the quality of the applicants was higher.
- **Reduced Overhead Costs** – In some cases, employers can reduce their office space costs if they have enough employees teleworking multiple days per week on a regular basis, thus enabling employees to share existing office space. Real estate costs are often the second largest organization expense, so cost savings can be substantial.
- **Increased Productivity** – Teleworkers consistently report getting more work done at home than when in the office, primarily due to fewer interruptions and being able to segregate telework and non-telework tasks which allows them to focus their time more effectively.

- **Reduced Absenteeism** – Telework allows employees to work all or part of day when it is necessary to stay at or be near home for an appointment or if they are not feeling well. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, colds force American workers to miss 20 million workdays a year. The flu accounts for another 70 million missed workdays. Teleworking often enables employees to remain productive for all or part of the workday, even if they do not feel well enough to come into the office. And, fewer sick employees at the office reduces exposure to others. Teleworking can also be used to accommodate employees recovering from an injury or illness that would otherwise prevent them from working.
- **Business Continuity** – A telework program is a key component of a solid business continuity program. Organizations with telework programs in place are better able to keep going in spite of weather or other incidents that could make it difficult for employees to get to the office, specifically essential employees whose absence will be felt almost immediately by other employees or customers.
- **Good Community Citizen Designation** – Organizations that communicate the benefits that they are providing to their employees and the community through a telework program can realize a good reputation as a good community citizen.

### Employee Benefits

- **Improved Work/Life Balance** – The average American spends about 1.5 hours daily commuting to and from work. Teleworkers can spend more time conducting personal business and with family and less time on the road.
- **Stress Reduction** – The stress of driving in heavy commutes is often reported as one of the top daily strains that employees report. Teleworkers experience less stress caused by commuting, including physical discomfort, air pollution, and noise.
- **Savings** – Teleworking one or two days per week can save employees up to 40% on average weekly fuel costs alone, and even more when considering wear and tear on their vehicles. Employees realize this as an “Indirect Pay Raise” that the company is allowing them. As gas prices continue to rise this benefit becomes more and more significant.
- **Increased Productivity** – Teleworkers are more productive and produce better quality work because they work in a quiet environment with minimal interruptions and have an increased ability to focus on specific work tasks.

### Societal and Environmental Benefits

- **Reduced Traffic Congestion** – Traffic congestion continues to worsen in American cities of all sizes, creating a \$78 billion annual drain on the U.S. economy in the form of 4.2 billion lost hours and 2.9 billion gallons of wasted fuel—that's 105 million weeks of vacation and 58 fully-loaded supertankers.
- **Reduced Auto Emissions That Contribute to Air Pollution** – Reducing auto emissions may not be the main reason for most employers to offer teleworking; however, it can have a significant impact on reducing emissions from vehicles that contribute to ground-level ozone and greenhouse gases.
- **Reduced Particulate Pollution** – Particulate pollution from automobiles is significant. A 2008 study in King County, Washington found that particulates from automobiles was the number one source of pollution in Puget Sound and other area waterways.
- **Less Gas Consumption** – Teleworking conserves resources through reduced gas consumption, helping reduce our nation's dependence on fossil fuels and foreign oil. Reducing the number of vehicles during peak-commutes reduces the level of congestion and stop/start driving for other commuters, increasing overall gas-mileage and further reducing overall gas consumption.

## Best Practices for Successful Implementation

Regardless of a company's specific business needs or the overall state of the economy, there are some common elements that greatly increase the probability of success for almost any telework program.

Following are the recommended best practices for the successful implementation of a telework program:

- **Secure Senior Management Buy-in** – Support from upper management is essential for a teleworking program to succeed. Be sure to outline goals of the program and how teleworking will benefit the business.
- **Identify Your Goals and Objectives** – In order to gain maximum benefit from a teleworking program, establish specific goals and objectives. These goals and objectives will serve as a basis for designing your program and provide a benchmark against which to measure its success. Quantifying these benefits, whether employee retention, increased productivity, increased office space flexibilities, or others specific to your organization such as reduced parking needs will help continue support for a telework program.
- **Appoint a Teleworking Advocate** – Any successful company-wide initiative such as teleworking needs an advocate to promote the program and coordinate all related activities.
- **Create a Telework Committee** – Your program affects managers and other employees throughout your organization. Make sure their viewpoints are represented on your committee, because you'll need their input and buy-in. A committee can also effectively track the benefits that the employees, organization and community are attaining through the program and communicate them to employees and upper management. Participants typically include human resources, information technology, communications, legal, and union representatives (if applicable).
- **Assess Your Organizations Remote Access Needs and Costs** – You need to know what equipment and technology you have in place, and what else you may need, to enable teleworking. Armed with that knowledge, you'll be able to obtain cost estimates for the technological components of your teleworking program.
- **Develop a Teleworking Policy and Agreement** – Create written policies and agreements that specify the roles, responsibilities, and requirements for the company and teleworkers. Managers and teleworkers need to agree on the terms and conditions under which employees are allowed to telework and how the program will be evaluated.
- **Train Managers and Teleworkers** – Teleworking involves new ways of doing things; hence, managers and teleworkers need to be properly trained at the outset so the program runs smoothly. Manager training can increase their overall effectiveness in areas such as managing by results and coordinating workgroup collaboration.
- **Conduct a Pilot Program** – Before going full speed ahead, test each element of the program with a subset of teleworking employees and their supervisors. Use the information gained in the pilot to refine the program, establish your outcomes and program metrics and then roll it out to the rest of the organization.
- **Communicate with All Staff** – Communicate regularly with all employees about the development and implementation of the telework program, and share program successes and results. Consider other alternative work schedules, such as compressed workweeks, for staff who are not interested in or eligible for the telework program.
- **Ongoing Support and Evaluation** – Be sure that teleworkers and managers receive the support they need to make teleworking successful on a daily basis. Also, periodically evaluate your program so you can fine-tune and make improvements as necessary. Evaluation should also include tracking the costs and benefits of the program.

## **Assessment Criteria**

Following are some considerations to guide organizations and managers to assess ideal teleworking situations. Remember that these are generic traits and should not be viewed as hard and fast rules. Failure to meet one or more of these criteria does not necessarily mean that teleworking is not feasible for an organization.

### ***Organizations Most Suited For Teleworking...***

- Are competitive, practical, and open to new ways of carrying out business and able to adapt to change.
- Understand the link between teleworking and improved productivity, employee morale, and more easily attracting and/or retaining top talent.
- Have a pressing issue to address, such as employee retention or lack of office space, that a telework program may help manage.
- Have staff that do not always need to be on site.
- Are willing to support teleworkers with adequate training, equipment, and information technology resources and support.
- Understand the value of work-life balance.

### ***The Right Job...***

- Includes portable tasks that can be performed off site and sent to and from the employee's home with ease, speed, and confidentiality.
- Can be performed without extensive face-to-face contact with managers, colleagues, clients, or subordinates.
- Includes tasks that can be performed without immediate access to equipment, materials, and files that are only accessible in the office.
- Can be performed while meeting organizational security requirements (e.g., does not require that sensitive or confidential documents be removed from the office).

### ***The Right Employees...***

- Are already familiar with their work, their organization and its culture, and with their colleagues.
- Are independent "self-starters" that do not require external prodding or stimulus in order to get on with the work.
- Are self-motivated, self-disciplined, able to ignore distractions, and can focus on the work to be done.
- Are adept at communicating quickly and effectively.
- Do not have high needs for social interaction at the workplace, (more applicable for multi-day teleworkers).
- Have suitable home workspaces that are equipped with the proper equipment/work tools and meet the organization's safety and ergonomic requirements.

### ***The Right Boss...***

- Is skilled at supervision and communication.
- Trusts their employee's to get their jobs done.
- Manages by objectives, agreed-upon performance standards, and deadlines.
- Evaluates performance by results rather than by the clock or 'face time'.
- Understands employee needs to balance work with personal life.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: What is teleworking?**

A: Teleworking replaces travel to and from work through a structured program using telecommunications technologies. It refers to working at home or another location on a full or part time basis. Many employees telework only once or twice per week. On the other hand, some employees telework full time and only go to the office on an occasional basis.

**Q: How do I know if the teleworkers are really working?**

A: The quality and quantity of the work completed by an employee is always the best indicator. As managers learn to manage remote workers, they must shift their focus from *seeing* an employee in the office to focusing on the reason the person is there in the first place – *to produce results*. Telework programs with established outcomes and metrics, and employees that have identified specific tasks to complete while teleworking allow managers to identify teleworking performance more readily.

**Q: What type of equipment is needed for teleworking?**

A: Teleworking can be done with as little technology as a phone, a piece of paper, and a pen. In other cases, teleworking may require computer hardware, software, secure remote access, and other technologies. The amount and type of equipment for successful teleworking will depend on the nature of the job, the frequency of teleworking and the technology infrastructure of the organization.

**Q: What types of jobs are appropriate for teleworking?**

A: Almost any job has components that are appropriate for teleworking, even if on an infrequent basis. Most “information-based” jobs are appropriate for teleworking. Teleworking is ideal for jobs that require reading, writing, research, working with data, and talking on the phone. Many jobs that may not seem appropriate at first may be modified so that the worker does the work most amendable to teleworking at home one or two days a week. One of the secrets of designing a good teleworking program lies in the ability to organize specific jobs so that they can be done without constant interaction or need for feedback. Such delineation of tasks also increases productivity because it makes use of the advantages of home and other work environments to achieve peak performance.

**Q: Which employees are ideal for teleworking?**

A: The ideal teleworker is well organized, can work independently, and requires minimal supervision. Successful teleworkers have a high degree of job skill and knowledge, and strong time management skills. Teleworkers like working at home or away from the office for at least part of the week and don't mind working alone. Teleworking is not ideal or desirable for every employee.

**Q: Who is the ideal manager for supervising teleworkers?**

A: The ideal manager of teleworkers has a positive attitude towards teleworking and is willing to allow employees to telework. Furthermore, the manager needs to be able to manage by results, delegates work easily, and trusts employees to get the job done. Not every manager is comfortable with the style of management that is required for a successful teleworking program. A thorough communication plan and management training are often effective creating very effective telework supervisor.

**Q: How will managers know how to supervise teleworkers?**

A: Teleworking presents an opportunity for managers to actually become better supervisors. By focusing on managing the work and producing results, managers will increase their own organizational skills and their ability to manage by tasks and objectives.

**Q: Will employees work less if they are at home working unsupervised?**

A: No – results from employers throughout the nation have shown a 10-20 percent increase in productivity attributed to the successful implementation of telework programs. Employees who work from home have fewer distractions and interruptions, work at their peak times, and experience less stress due to the absence of the commute to work. Employees who desire to telework are often motivated to work more, not less, in order to continue participating in a telework program.

**Q: Will loyalty to the company be diminished?**

A: No – loyalty is actually likely to improve as employees are happier with their working conditions. Employee morale also improves as a result of teleworking. It's an appealing benefit that many workers cite as a reason to stay with their present employer. Studies have shown that even non-teleworkers experience an increase in loyalty to their company as they observe that company is actively implementing programs that positively impact employees.

**Q: How can social interaction be maintained to keep teleworkers from feeling isolated?**

A: Many techniques are available to overcome the feeling of isolation. These include part-time teleworking and regular communication with others by phone, email, instant messaging, conference calls, and/or web video conferencing. Also, teleworkers should be included in all scheduled meeting and events. Teleworkers often realize increased social interaction in their communities that offsets reduced social interaction in the workplace.

**Q: What happens if the employee is injured at home while working?**

A: Generally, employees injured while performing work-related tasks while teleworking are covered by workers compensation, just like the regular place of business. That said, the telework agreement should identify the employee's designated work area and hours. Furthermore, the organization's telework policy should address requirements and procedures for reporting work-related injuries when teleworking.

**Q: Is teleworking a substitute for child or elder-care?**

A: No – a teleworker must focus on his or her job, not handle demanding child or elder-care situations. However, due to their flexibility, teleworkers are better able to manage their work and family schedules. As a result of this flexibility, these employees will have a reduced need for planned or unplanned absenteeism.

**Q: Can teleworking result in reduced use of sick leave?**

A: Yes – an employee who may not feel well enough to report to the office may be able to remain all or part of the day by teleworking. Teleworkers are also often able to work in spite of unexpected family emergencies.

**Q: Will the need for overtime decrease as a result of teleworking?**

A: Teleworkers are generally more productive while teleworking and often are incentivized to work more in order to continue their participation in the program. In some cases this may reduce overtime.

**Q: What are some of the issues that teleworkers should be aware of?**

A: Teleworkers should designate a work area for teleworking in their homes. A separate room provides greater privacy but is not necessarily required. Teleworkers must gain the trust and support of their families, coworkers, clients, and managers. Teleworkers must place added focus on responding to emails and voicemails in a timely manner. Teleworkers need to be aware of the tendency to work long hours and the need to take regular breaks.