

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **How do I know if telecommuters are really working?**

The employee's completed work product is the indicator that he/she is working. Managers of telecommuters must focus on the quality, quantity, and timeliness of the work product, rather than on the process the telecommuter used to achieve the end result. Managers must manage by objectives or results, rather than by observation. The manager and the employee should establish the employee's goals and objectives together.

**Will the employee work less if they are working at home unsupervised?** No. Survey results show marked improvements in productivity. Productivity increases because employees have fewer distractions and interruptions, work at their best times, and are less stressed due to the absence of the commute to work.

**How will managers know how to supervise telecommuters?** Telecommuting presents an opportunity for managers to become better managers. By focusing on the employee's work product, managers will increase their own organizational skills and their own skills in managing by objectives. Managers of telecommuters should be given training on managing remote employees.

### **What kinds of jobs and what type of employees are suitable for telecommuting?**

Many jobs or parts of jobs are suitable for telecommuting. Tasks that are successfully managed in telecommuting programs are those where the individual already works alone handling information, such as writing, reading, making phone calls, computer programming, word processing, and data entry.

**Should a supervisor require an employee to work at home?** No. Participation in a telecommuting program should be entirely voluntary.

**How are telecommuters selected?** Managers or supervisors who understand the concept of telecommuting should identify jobs they feel are suitable for work away from the traditional office. Employees may fill-out questionnaires which have been developed to assist departments in determining employees whose jobs and personal characteristics make them good candidates for successful telecommuting. To be selected, an employee must have the endorsement of his/her supervisor.

**Won't loyalty to the organization diminish?** No. In actuality, loyalty is likely to improve since employees are happier with their work conditions. Employee morale also improves as a result of telecommuting.

**Is this program only for employees who use and/or have computers?** No. A computer is not mandatory to be a successful telecommuter. The minimum equipment necessary to participate in the program is a telephone. Some successful telecommuters use only pencil and paper to perform their duties. Technology can help create and integrate voice and data functions if required.

**What should employers do to prepare employees to be effective telecommuters?**

With the assistance of experienced organizations, an employer can design a training program for participants and their managers. Training should cover many issues critical to the success of a telecommuting program.

**How can social interaction be maintained to keep telecommuters from feeling isolated from their colleagues?** There are many techniques for overcoming feelings of isolation. These include part-time telecommuting, core days in the office, and frequent communication by telephone or voice mail. The telecommuters should be included in all scheduled meetings and events.

**Is telecommuting a substitute for child or elder care?** No. A telecommuter must focus on his/her job, and not try to handle demanding child or elder care situations while working. However, telecommuters are better able to manage their work/family schedules because they have greater flexibility in their work hours.

**Can telecommuting result in reduced use of sick leave?** Yes. An employee working in the regular office usually has to use a half day of sick time to get to a doctor or dental appointment. A telecommuter can take an hour or two off for the appointment and then work that time later in the day or the week, thus not using any sick time. Also, often an employee that does not feel well enough to drive to the office can work some hours at home.

**What are the issues the telecommuters should be aware of?**

**Coping with interruptions.** Often friends, neighbors, and family members do not realize that a telecommuter is working. Although an occasional interruption may be welcome, telecommuters must learn to keep interruptions to a minimum.

**Working long hours.** Telecommuters need to be aware of the tendency to work long hours and the need to take regular breaks.

**Exercising self-control.** If telecommuters find themselves procrastinating, they should evaluate their work habits and make necessary changes to ensure productivity.

**Designating space.** A designated work area is recommended for telecommuting. A separate work space may mean fewer distractions or interruptions and a higher level of discipline and organization.

**Gaining support.** A family's or supervisor's attitude may sometimes be detrimental to a telecommuting arrangement. Telecommuters must work to gain the support and understanding of those around them.

**How do you manage the employees who are not telecommuting?** It is important to include the non-telecommuters in your planning process. Specific guidelines should be established regarding how the workload is distributed so as not to overload the telecommuters. Also, all employees should have a clear understanding of the selection criteria for telecommuters to minimize feelings of resentment over who is and who is not selected to participate in the program.

**What happens if the employee is hurt at home while working?** An employee is covered for worker's compensation while working at their designated home work space.

**Will the need for overtime decrease as a result of telecommuting?** With telecommuting, employee productivity generally increases, which could reduce overtime.

Reference: Commuter Challenge Website