

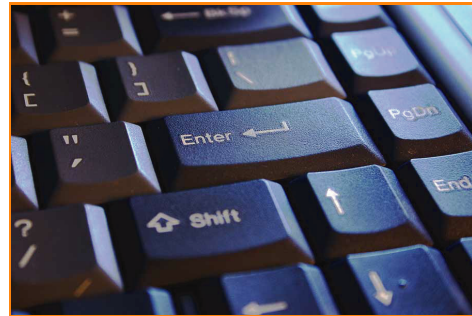
MANAGING REMOTE WORKERS & VIRTUAL TEAMS

Speaking of the American minister to Spain: "I haven't heard from him in two years. If I don't hear from him next year, I will write him a letter." *Thomas Jefferson*



Read and/or discuss during a coaching session or other meeting.

Anyone who interfaces with remote workers



Managing and/or working together with individuals who telecommute or work from off-site locations.

To improve the productivity and satisfaction of the teleworker and their colleagues.



Cautions:

- Trust your colleagues; balance your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in order to avoid micromanaging or losing touch with teleworkers
- Be cautious of your email wording as emotions and intent are often misinterpreted

Nilles, J.M. (1998). *Managing Telework: Strategies for Managing the Virtual Workforce*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



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Is telecommuting appropriate for the task?

- Research the job description. What actual tasks do the employee conduct?
- Does the position require frequent on-site face-to-face interactions?
- Can the majority of tasks be performed off-site?
- Is it feasible to telecommute certain days? (i.e. 3 out of 5 days)
- Can the organization's intranet be used from remote location?
- Consider interviewing individuals holding similar positions who telecommute. How is telecommuting working for them?

Pros and Cons of telecommuting:

Before an individual decides to start telecommuting, either part time or full time, it's important to be aware of both the positive and negative aspects of this approach:

Pros

- Flexibility - makes it easier to assist children in the morning, ability to break up the day by going to the gym, and attending to doctor visits
- Increased productivity - studies show that supervisors report on average greater effectiveness among their teleworking employees versus regular workers; indicating that telecommuters get more work done (Nilles, 1998)
- Time and money saved through elimination of commute
- Lower employer overhead costs due to less direct supervision and use of physical work stations
- Fewer distractions from corporate office environment
- Less fossil fuel consumption - saves gas, money, the environment, and may also lead to improved corporate image

Cons

- Isolation - if extroverted and social, individual may miss the social interactions inherent in an on-site location
- Distractions - family members, neighbors, TV, delivery personnel, etc.
- Less direct control and oversight by management
- Communication gaps between remote team members who cannot meet in person
- Possibility of decreased motivation due to lack of visual cues
- Inability to separate work and personal life

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Valuable telecommuter characteristics (who makes a good telecommuter?)

- Ability to set routines and meet deadlines
- Self-motivated
- Low need for face-to-face supervision, visibility and direct recognition
- Independence, responsibility and confidence, ability to make independent decisions
- Capability to work alone for extended periods of time
- Technologically savvy
- Ability to balance work and personal life

Things to consider before getting started:

- Focus on a good individual/team kick-off. It is always helpful to meet face-to-face initially, if possible. During this meeting discuss the following :
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Expectations
 - Main form of communication; email, phone, etc.
 - Turn around time - answer email or phone message within certain number of hours
 - Resources available - designated work area including computer, desk, chair, voicemail system, intranet
- Build trust between supervisor and other coworkers by exploring:
 - How and under what format will feedback be provided? (weekly, bi-monthly or monthly face-to-face meetings, teleconference, phone, etc.)
 - About what is the employee concerned?
 - Will I, as a manager, feel comfortable and trust that the individual will do their work? Why, why not?
- Consider implementing a mentoring program involving experienced and novice telecommuters

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Managing remote workers:

- Do not micromanage due to a lack of trust in the individual's ability or your own difficulty delegating
- Paint the big picture
- Focus on results rather than the process
- Provide structure
- Provide ongoing coaching and guidance
- Introduce and assist the team players in understanding the role of each employee, and what their needs may be
- Provide adequate technical support
- Request feedback from teleworkers: What's working? What is not working? What improvements do you suggest?

(Suggestions on how to manage workers based on Nilles, J.M. (1998). *Managing Telework: Strategies for Managing the Virtual Workforce*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and Fisher, K. & Fisher, D.F. (2001). *The Distance Manager: A Hands-on Guide to Managing Off-Site Employees and Virtual Teams*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill)



- Pilot test the concepts
- Evaluate current teleworking methods