



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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How to Manage Teleworkers

Everyone should know the basics of teleworking or telecommuting. Many organizations have integrated this program into their work environment. Others are struggling to determine how to approach this.

The Benefits

There are a number of tangible and intangible benefits associated with a telework policy. First of all, it is perceived as a quality of life benefit. People are generally happier if they have an option to work at home one or more days per week. It keeps them out of the traffic, keeps office distractions to a minimum and allows people to focus on their work for a large block of time. This can lead to a situation where people are more productive. Because the percentage of companies offering teleworking is still small, it also can be used to increase retention amongst your current staff, and lead to easier recruiting of new staff

The Problems

There are real and perceived barriers to teleworking as well. For instance, there may be incremental hardware and software costs to get connected. There is also a concern that less personal interaction will lead to problems associated with teamwork and comradery. However, the biggest barrier is usually a management mindset. Managers are concerned that since they can't see teleworkers, it's hard to know what they are doing and whether they are being as productive as they are in the office.

Your company can implement teleworking by asking the following question - can a person effectively do their job from home, given that the right logistics are available and there is proper management focus? In the IT development world, for instance, programmers basically sit at their desks for hours, or days, focusing on coding and testing. This work can be done from home, maybe more effectively than in the office. (Unless you are doing pair programming.) Systems Analysts need to be in the office to meet with their business clients, but much of their analysis work can be done from home. Project Managers probably need to spend most of their time in the office, since they spend much of their time interacting with people.

Start with a Pilot Project

Don't make a full commitment up front. Sponsor a pilot project to see whether and how a teleworking program would work in your organization. Most of the information you need to get started, such as overall process, benefits, costs, hardware/software, management focus, training, etc. are available from a multitude of sites on the web. Start with a teleworking option of one day per week. Evaluate whether it is successful and then see what it would take to implement on a larger scale in your organization.

Track the Results



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At least in the beginning, I would recommend teleworkers be very diligent in showing that they are getting their work done from home. You can demonstrate this by having the teleworker document the work they plan to do from home, and then having them validate whether all the work was completed. If not, he or she should explain why. As long as the manager is satisfied with the level of work assigned for the telework day, there should not be a problem if that work is completed. This level of reporting may not be needed when people are comfortable that the program is working effectively.

Summary

Employees love a teleworking option, even if it is one day per week. This should translate into higher morale, increased retention and decreased time to find new employees. However, teleworking must make business sense. If people can be just as productive as in the office, plus you get the intangible benefits expressed above, it should make sense. If certain jobs can be done more effectively at home, you have a powerful business case. The biggest obstacle you will face is not from the teleworkers, but from the managers. Managers need to feel comfortable knowing that deadlines are met, not from knowing a person is in their desk all day. Prepare your managers and the teleworkers for the new paradigm.