Telecommuting (working part- or full-time away from the office, usually at home) can have numerous benefits for both employers and employees—improved productivity, reduced costs, lower turnover, and increased flexibility—when implemented and managed properly. But managing employees who telecommute also brings unique challenges, including measuring productivity, staying connected, facilitating teamwork, etc. If you are a manager or supervisor who oversees employees who telecommute, the following list of tips may help you be a more effective manager. (Please note, this guide contains general information only; for specific questions about policies or management issues within your organization; please contact your Human Resources Department.)

- **Take advantage of training programs.** If your company offers training on telecommuting issues, encourage employees to participate (or make it mandatory) and participate yourself so everyone is clear on guidelines and goals of the program.

- **Make sure employees have the proper equipment.** Provide employees with the equipment needed to work efficiently from home. Discuss each employee’s specific needs and ensure that it is possible for them to work from home effectively. For example, some organizations offer employees high-speed computer access, a dedicated telephone line, fax machines, printers, scanners, etc.

- **Be flexible.** Remember that there may be a period of transition as employees adjust to the new telecommuting arrangement. Give employees time to settle in and get used to the new work dynamic. Schedule regular meetings to evaluate processes and determine what works—and what is not working—and how needs can be met.

- **Consider your measures for success.** When measuring telecommuters’ performance, it’s important to shift your focus to outcome and results, rather than “face time” or attendance. Set standards for measuring quality and productivity—for example, meeting deadlines, making a sales quota, or bringing a project in under budget—rather than time spent in the home office.

Not all employees are suited for telecommuting. Part of being an effective manager is recognizing which employees are good candidates for working from home. Telecommuting arrangements typically are most successful for employees who have proven track records, are self-disciplined and need minimal supervision. However, keep in mind that decisions regarding eligibility for telecommuting and other FWAs must be made in accordance with non-discriminatory and organizational policies. Check with your Human Resources department before making decisions regarding which employees may or may not telecommute.
**Learn to trust.** Recognize that effective management of employees who telecommute is based on trust. Because you can’t see employees at work each day, learning to trust that they are working (supported with quantitative results) is crucial.

**Set specific guidelines.** Before beginning a telecommuting arrangement, meet with employees to set expectations regarding the hours they are expected to work, how often they should check e-mail and voice mail, and how much flexibility they have in terms of when they work (e.g., weekends, nighttime, etc.).

**Document goals for performance.** While this is important for all employees, it is even more critical to set specific goals for telecommuters since their location requires them to work more independently and with minimal supervision. Consider outlining what you expect to be accomplished on a daily, weekly, quarterly and/or yearly basis and make clear how performance evaluations will be tied to fulfillment of the goals.

**Provide feedback.** Regular, constructive feedback is essential to successfully managing telecommuters, especially during the transition period. Make sure expectations and goals are being met from the start. And, don’t stop once you’ve established a good telecommuting relationship. Employees should be aware of how they’re doing at all times—not just at the annual review.

**Stay connected.** Figure out a system to keep remote employees in the loop and provide regular feedback. Have weekly conference calls, arrange regular in-person meetings, and organize social get-togethers outside of work if that is something you did as a team previously. Remind telecommuters that they’ll need to take an active role in maintaining communication links with managers and co-workers as well.

**Emphasize equal opportunity for career advancement.** One common concern of telecommuters is being passed over for promotions, important projects or participation on committees. Address any concerns and make sure to include them when new opportunities arise.

**Provide opportunities for growth.** Encourage employees to take charge when it comes to professional development. Allow them to join professional organizations, attend conferences, subscribe to industry publications and participate in job-related training—both in the office and off-site.

Finally, telecommuting may not work for all positions in your organization. If you have some employees who cannot telecommute due to the nature of their job, consider talking to your Human Resources department about offering other types of flexible work arrangements to help you retain valuable employees, for example, compressed work weeks (working a full-time schedule in fewer than five days per week), flexible scheduling (varying starting and ending times), etc.