



Successful Telecommuting

Telecommuting (working part- or full-time away from the office, usually at home) offers numerous benefits—greater flexibility, no commute, less stress, and increased productivity. However, there are certain challenges you may face when working from home. If you are thinking about or planning to telecommute one or more days a week, this guide provides positive tips to help you avoid common pitfalls and work successfully from home. (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.)

Tips for a Successful Transition to Telecommuting

- **Understand your employer's expectations.** Talk to your Human Resources representative and manager to determine what your employer's expectations are regarding the hours you will be available, how often you are expected to check e-mail and voice mail, the flexibility of your schedule, etc. For instance, can you work any hours you wish (nighttime, weekends, early morning) or are you expected to be working regular office hours (9:00-5:00)? Are you expected to visit the office on a regular basis? If so, how often?
- **Take advantage of training.** If your employer offers training for employees who are telecommuting, be sure to take advantage of this opportunity. Training can help you further understand the challenges of working from home, provide you with solutions, and outline the specific expectations and rules set by your employer for telecommuters.
- **Make appropriate child care/elder care arrangements.** Even though you may be at home, you'll need to have child and/or elder care in place to allow you to focus on your work without distraction. Think about the hours you'll need care, and investigate your options. For example, is in-home care appropriate or will you need a care arrangement outside the home in order to work effectively?
- **Set up a suitable workspace.** Ideally, you should have a separate space for working that includes a desk, filing cabinet, and tools to help you get organized, such as file folders, office supplies, etc. Working from the kitchen table, for example, may cause you to be distracted, disorganized and feel like you're at home, rather than working from home.
- **Discuss your equipment needs with your manager.** In addition to setting up a workspace, ask your manager what tools (e.g., high speed computer access, a separate telephone line, fax machine, printer, etc.) your organization will provide for your home office and what you are responsible for obtaining.
- **Work with your manager to set specific, measurable goals.** It can be difficult for employees and managers alike to adjust to a telecommuting arrangement, particularly when it comes to evaluating productivity. While working from home often increases productivity, employees may feel as if their work is going unrecognized when they aren't physically in the office. Consider setting specific goals with your manager and meeting with him or her regularly to evaluate your progress, as well as areas for improvement, and discuss how you can get involved in new projects, work on special committees, etc.

Tips for Working From Home

Once you've set up your home office and telecommuting arrangement, you'll still need to make a concerted effort to stay motivated, and continue working efficiently and effectively on a day-to-day basis. The following tips may help you successfully work from home on an ongoing basis:

- **Set goals for yourself.** Keep yourself motivated by setting daily, weekly and quarterly goals for yourself. One of the potential drawbacks of working on your own time is getting distracted and putting off work to do laundry, cook dinner, etc. By creating goals for yourself, you may be more likely to be productive. For example, one goal may be to make five client calls today and send out two finished proposals by the end of the week.
- **Take regular breaks to avoid stress.** When working from home, it's easy to get immersed in your work and forget to take regular breaks, which can lead to stress. Consider taking a short, brisk walk at lunchtime or stretching at your desk to relieve tension.
- **Separate work and family time.** Establish specific times when you are at work and don't allow distractions like housework, deliveries, errands, etc. to intrude on that time. Likewise, "workaholics" may work too much when their workspace is accessible at all hours. If this is an issue for you, once you're done with work for the day, consider turning off the computer, turning on your voice mail, and shutting the door to your office space (if possible) to separate work time from family time.

- **Create a network of support.** If others in your office are also now telecommuting, consider keeping in touch via telephone or e-mail to keep each other motivated and exchange ideas about what works and doesn't work when working from home.
- **Maintain social ties.** If you had a social network in the workplace, make an effort to maintain your friendships. Some find that one of the drawbacks of working from home is that it can be isolating. Consider planning regular get-togethers with co-workers. For example, if you regularly went out to lunch or had after-work outings with friends from the office, continue to keep in touch and make plans to meet even while working from home.
- **Dress for success.** One of the perks of working at home is being able to dress as casually as you like. However, if you are a person who has trouble getting motivated to work, try dressing as if you were going to the office or meeting clients.

Finally, keep in mind that telecommuting may not work for all positions in your organization. If you are unable to telecommute due to the nature of your job, consider talking to your manager or Human Resources department about other types of flexible work arrangements that may be offered, 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.

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