
He Said...Telecommuting

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Bowl of popcorn? Check. Soda? Check. Remote control? Check. Oh yes, one more thing: Computer? Check. I'm ready to get to work!

My experience with telecommuting was very brief but rewarding. I telecommuted for approximately four months. The rise of high-speed data delivery methods such as cable modem and DSL has ensured that even users as remote as I am (WAY out in the countryside) can work from home. I also have a wireless setup, which allows me to work anywhere in the house that you can image (well, almost any location).

My manager was often out of town and telecommuted much of the time when she was in Huntsville, as did one or two of the other employees managed by another location. I was the only writer and managed my own projects, so I was given the option to telecommute two days per week.

The textbook used by the information systems class I help teach at Florida Tech includes a section on telecommuting. Several advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting are discussed, some of which I experienced and others that I did not.

Advantages

The first advantage is the flexibility to juggle job and personal tasks. This was an aspect of telecommuting that I thoroughly enjoyed. I was working on a side project at the time,

so I could attend meetings and work a longer day to make up the time. It was also nice to be able to go shopping at non-peak hours and take care of household chores when necessary.

The other discussed advantage was that companies pay more attention to telecommuters due to their network needs. Our office was small and remote, so I took care of my own home network setup and issues. I never had any problems that I could not solve. The only technical glitch that I experienced was an occasional upload failure to our shared Intranet workspace.

The biggest advantages I encountered were not discussed in the book. First, the savings in gas were significant. Prices were near three dollars per gallon during my time telecommuting. Another advantage that I enjoyed was time. My commute was 45 minutes each way, so telecommuting two days added almost a half-day to my week.

Disadvantages

Of course, everything has its downside. The book discussed three of these, none of which I experienced. They were: developing a sense of not belonging, fear of job loss or career damage, and increased family tension.

Since I attended daily conference calls and constantly kept in touch with co-workers via instant messaging and email, I was very visible. The personnel were distributed among three cities, so only one group was located with upper management and I saw no career advantages. In fact, the only

promotions I saw were at the other remote location and were all related to merit.

Although I did lose the job, it had nothing to do directly with telecommuting but choosing to not relocate.

I help my elderly parents out quite a bit, so seeing them a little more was not an issue. The only tension I ever felt was when my dog Tessie begged for food. I cannot address how the dynamics of having small children and/or a spouse/partner present would affect this aspect. These two groups were singled out in the book as potential problem areas.

Summary

Overall, telecommuting had a number of great benefits. I had more time, money, and flexibility, plus my productivity dramatically increased. All of these resulted in my being a happier employee.

To be honest, I do not think I would like telecommuting full-time. Having a blend of time at home and in the office was the best of both worlds. There is no chance for telecommuting in my current job, but everything changes with the times.

Just like a traditional workplace, I had to leave a lot of friends behind when I stopped telecommuting. Goodbye to you, Bob Barker, Oprah, and Dr. Phil until I telecommute again. I'm keeping that bag of popcorn handy just in case.

