

# TELEWORK



A Practical  
Guide  
for  
Working  
at Home

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# Foreword

*"Commuting to office work is obsolete. It is now infinitely easier, cheaper and faster to . . . move information . . . to where the people are."*

*Peter F. Drucker*

Welcome to the State of Arizona's Telework Program. You are part of a new and growing number of State employees who will be spending one or more days a week working at home -- instead of in the office.

Although some of us already work at home during evenings and weekends, or even the workday, the State's Telework Program formally recognizes the value of working at home.

Telework is an innovative solution to some of the problems facing the Valley today. Working at home will reduce the number of cars on the roads, the amount of pollution we pump into the air, and the gallons of fuel we consume.

In addition, several studies have shown that telework can increase productivity, reduce stress and enhance the quality of work, while reducing the number of cars on the roads during rush hour.

As a teleworker, you will be a positive force in helping the State meet its community and functional needs. Thank you for being a part of this team.

# Introduction

It's remarkable. The idea of working at home is nothing new, but during the past few years, telework has been polished and shined and unveiled as a realistic solution to some very serious problems. Why?

Look at the freeways and roads. They're crowded, and the amount of traffic is increasing faster than we can expand them. Delays in getting from home to the office and back are already affecting the way you schedule things. Today it's often easier to bring the work to the worker than vice versa.

Telework is one way to address these problems and it may be the best way. Technology has evolved so far and so fast in the past few years that access to home computing and communications is both affordable and efficient. Workers can do virtually anything at home that can be done in the office.

So can many State employees. Millions of Americans already work at home, at least part of the time. The State's telework program, however, formally enables participants to work at home when appropriate. Most will telework one or two days each week. This innovative program will give participating State employees more control over their work and lives.

This manual offers suggestions to help you work at home successfully. It also discusses what supervisors might do to better manage teleworkers. Implicit in this manual is the expectation that: It takes two to telework.

The State's telework program is a way to help you work better and smarter. If it doesn't work for you, no problem. Telework is voluntary. If you find that telework helps, great. You'll be part of a new and growing group of State employees spending more time on work instead of on the freeway.

## Being A Teleworker

*"We have to break through the idea that an executive is a person who drives 33 miles a day to a central location where hundreds or thousands of people work in cubicles and, unless you go there, nothing gets done."*

*Alvin Toffler*

To be a successful teleworker, you'll need to deal with less structure and more freedom in completing your work.

Telework is not as simple as it sounds -- and it's not for everyone. Telework requires careful planning and discipline.

The following section will provide you with some basic ideas for working at home -- many of which you might already know. But these suggestions will take on more importance after you begin working at home.

# Getting Organized

## Choose a Work Location

It's important that you identify a safe location in your home as your work space. But you don't need to devote a whole room to your work station. Some teleworkers have successfully developed part of an existing room -- a garage, an attic, and even a closet into their work station. Don't try working on the couch in front of the television or on the dining room table. It doesn't work.

## Establish a Routine

Try to set a work schedule for the days you telework and stick to it as much as possible. Make sure you set aside time for breaks -- take a walk, water the garden, or ride a bike.

## Replace the Ritual of Getting Ready for the Office with Another Ritual

As a teleworker, you'll no longer have the traditional office rituals of morning conversations, coffee runs or even the dreadful commute that often symbolize the beginning of the work day. So, you may need to establish some new rituals. Some teleworkers take a walk around the block and return home for work. Others play some music or start working after morning exercises. Find a ritual that will work for you.

## Make a "To Do" List

Develop a list of objectives for the days you telework. Write it, maybe with the assistance of your supervisor, the day before you telework. And, try to schedule your work so you don't need assistance from others on your telework days. Remember that you may not have access to a fax machine, a copier or even a computer and plan accordingly.

## Have an End-of-the-Day Ritual

It's wise to have some ritual that marks the end of the work day. Be creative.

# **Managing Your Work**

## **Maintain Contact With the Office**

Make sure you stay in touch with the office. Call a secretary or receptionist to check for messages -- the average is three or four times a day. You should be as accessible at home as you are at the office.

## **Tell Co-Workers and Support Staff that You're Telework**

The people you work with should know your home phone number. The support staff should know where to refer callers and how to handle inquiries. And make sure the office understands that you are available during designated hours.

## **Stick to Deadlines**

It may sound obvious, but make sure you're following the same rules for deadlines as in the office. If you need to deliver work to the office on a scheduled telework day, it might be wise to self impose an earlier deadline or postpone working at home until the following day.

## **Keep Your Supervisor Informed of Your Progress**

As a teleworker, you'll need to make sure that your supervisor is well informed of the status of your work. You may want to establish a method of periodic reporting, perhaps on a weekly basis. Find ways to assure an uninterrupted flow of information.

## **Try Not to Miss Meetings at the Office**

You don't want to become invisible just because you're telework. Be sure to schedule your days at home around office meetings.

# **Training Family Members, Friends and Neighbors**

## **Do Some Advance Work**

You'll need to let everyone around you know that you are working at home, but that you still have the same responsibilities as an employee. Tell family and friends that your objectives, goals and deadlines are the same; the only difference is that you can complete part of your assignments at home.

## **Tell your Family What Kind of Interruptions are OK**

You should decide when family members or others may interrupt your work to ask you questions, ask favors, or have you respond to some kind of request. Some teleworkers have their families set the rules, so they can buy into the whole process. You may also need to set some rules with neighbors. But don't lose your cool; sometimes a short visit with a friend or family member may be the break you need.

## **Set Rules for Using Home Office Materials**

You may need to have some rules about the use of your office supplies. Decide whether family members may borrow pens, stapler, etc. You may want to call your work space off-limits to members of your household.

## **Don't Telework if There are Problems at Home**

Avoid telework on days when there might be friction at the home, like family quarrels or problems. Additionally, if you have an elderly family member or a small child at home during the day, it may be difficult to work. You may want to wait until you have help at home or can be alone before you start telework.

## **Telework Does Not Replace Child Care**

Don't assume that because you are working at home, you can also take care of the kids. It doesn't work! Telework can give you more flexibility in accommodating child care needs, but if you attempt to take care of the kids and work, you might actually end up with two jobs instead of one.

# Developing Good Habits

## Pace Yourself So You Don't Burn Out

Make sure you're taking enough breaks. It's surprisingly easy to work without stopping. On the other hand, don't develop bad work habits and do less work than before.

## Watch Out For Bad Habits

Watch out for the following: snacking too often, sleeping late, talking on the phone for long periods, watching TV, wearing your pajamas all day, paying the neighbors too many visits, and procrastinating. Avoid any temptations that slow you down.

## The Don'ts

Don't sit in bed or on the living room couch when working.

Don't procrastinate or develop bad work habits.

Don't change your work schedule every time you telework.

Don't let the radio or TV distract you or impair your professional image.

Don't work at home if you are not getting along with family members.

Don't work at home if you have a small child or an elderly person that requires your constant care and attention.

Don't take work home that requires group decisions or constant input from co-workers.

Don't run to the refrigerator when you are telework.

Don't start sleeping late on telework days.

Don't stay in bed clothes all day.

Don't continue to telework if it's not working for you.

Don't run everyone's errands just because you're home -- try to plan errand runs for on the way home from the office on the days you do commute.

## **The Do's**

Have a work space or work station at home.

Take a walk around the block before you start.

Keep a consistent schedule on telework days.

Take breaks throughout the day.

Keep your work organized so you know what paperwork is at home, and what's at the office.

Plan your telework work a day ahead of time.

Let family members and neighbors know when and how often you may be interrupted.

Call the office and keep in touch as often as possible.

Stick to all deadlines.

Maintain or increase your level of performance.

Take telework seriously.

Attend all department and group meetings.

Keep your supervisor informed of your progress.

Have some type of ritual to begin and end your day.

If telework is not working out for you, talk to your supervisor.

# **Your Work Space**

You might want to spend some time thinking about where you'll be working. Is it quiet? How's the lighting? Do you have the equipment necessary to do the job? The following suggestions on home ergonomics should help you create a comfortable working environment.

## **Your Desk**

A commonly recommended height for desks with computers is approximately 26 inches. If you will be working without a computer, you might find a slightly taller desk more comfortable.

## **Your Chair**

This is probably the most important piece of furniture in your home office. The seat should be adjustable and the height of the top of the seat to the floor should be 15-21 inches.

## **Lighting**

Lighting can affect your comfort and performance. Whether you are using natural or artificial lighting, it should be directed toward the side or behind your line of vision, not in front or above it. Bright light sources can bounce off of working surfaces and diminish your sense of contrast. Northern daylight is the best light for your home office and for operating a computer as well.

## **Noise**

A totally noise-free environment can be stressful. Psychologically, some background sound (like music) can be beneficial in maintaining a level of productivity and reducing boredom. But your professional image may be affected if callers hear crying children, lawn mowers, vacuum cleaners or barking dogs. If others are in the house, it may be necessary to work behind a closed door.

## Supervising Teleworkers

*"Companies that do nothing but put a bunch of terminals in people's homes and nothing else will create chaos. There has to be a well-planned effort to manage these people and make sure they still are part of the office."*

*Alan Jay Weiss  
President, Summitt  
Consulting Group*

The skills you have now as a supervisor will serve you well while overseeing teleworkers. Basic management tools are just as important for teleworkers as they are for people in the office. But you may need to tailor your supervision for those working at home: "Management By Walking Around" won't work.

You'll probably find that you need to focus more on results than by appearance. Scheduling might get tricky. And you'll be called upon to show trust and support to employees who are telework -- and to those who are not. Remember, it takes two to telework.

# **Management Skills**

## **Assist Your Teleworkers in Organizing Their Work**

You need to understand the time frames involved in completing tasks and the resources required to see projects through. By using your planning skills as a supervisor, you will distribute work more equitably among your employees and should feel confident that they will be capable of completing the tasks you assign.

## **Assigning Work to the Employees**

You will need to establish a means of communicating your work expectations and the due date, the anticipated quality and any other criteria which might affect the successful completion of tasks. As a manager of remote employees, your valuable time spent communicating with teleworkers will dictate the caliber of work they produce.

## **Reviewing Status**

Establish definite times to review the progress of tasks. If it's during a staff meeting, make sure all employees involved will be able to attend.

## **Coaching and Developing Employee's Capabilities**

The time you'll be able to spend with your remote employees reinforcing their behavior may be limited, so make the most of it. Quickly reinforce positive behavior and bring unsatisfactory performance to the employee's attention. Provide your employees with timely and ongoing feedback either in person, by telephone, or through a note.

## **Management Methods**

Managing employees who are working in a variety of locations isn't new. But to insure the success of telework, be aware of the following:

- Managing by close, constant supervision isn't necessarily good supervision. You can achieve good supervision without proximity.
- In order for your teleworkers to succeed at working at home, you must succeed at supervising. Remember, this is a win-win situation for you and your employees.
- You will be managing by objectives and results, instead of by observation.

## **Management by Objectives**

One of the tools available to you -- and one that is particularly effective with teleworkers -- is Management by Objectives (MBO). You probably already know a good deal about this topic, but it's added here to provide some suggestions for working with teleworkers.

- Prepare an itemized list of what you expect from your teleworker. The list can be done weekly, monthly or quarterly. You have the flexibility to establish objectives in a format that will be easy for you to administer.
- Include your teleworker in the process of establishing objectives, allowing the employee to have valuable input about his/her productivity.
- Clearly define what the teleworker needs to accomplish to be rated as unsatisfactory, satisfactory or excellent.
- Track progress by results. If you are establishing weekly objectives, schedule a weekly meeting to review the teleworker's accomplishments. Maintain a copy of the objectives in the employee's personnel file and make a copy for the employee.

# Telework Issues

Before your employees begin working at home, you might keep in mind some of these issues that can be sensitive to both teleworkers and non-teleworkers.

## **Suggestions for Managing Non-Teleworkers in a Telework Environment**

As you work with participants in the telework program, you need to be careful with non-teleworkers, to avoid their feeling left out. Prepare in advance the necessary documentation to support your decision of who was chosen to telework. Should you have non-telework employees who have been excluded from the program because of poor job performance, you might begin a program to assist those employees in raising their job performance level.

### **Team Effort**

Non-teleworkers are as critical to the program's effectiveness as the teleworker. The success of your group depends on the efforts of everyone. Understanding the components of what makes your team successful will guarantee continued success.

### **Team Support**

Non-teleworkers shouldn't be expected to do extra work in the office while teleworkers are working at home. Try to make sure you're consistent in making assignments and in providing support to your employees.

### **Communication Links**

Establish guidelines for contacting teleworkers when an issue arises in the office that requires immediate action. Don't expect non-teleworkers to work on their own assignments as well as handling problems for teleworkers. Establish guidelines for answering the teleworker's phones while they are at home. But refrain from advising callers, "Ms. Jones is at home today." Instead say, "Ms. Jones is unavailable at this time. I'll be happy to have her return your call as soon as possible." Or, "You can reach Ms. Jones at (phone number)." Additionally, have teleworkers call the office at regular intervals. And provide support staff with home phone numbers.

## **Contingency Plans**

Establish Murphy's Law strategies to guide your work group through "what if" situations. Address all issues that are pertinent to the team and encourage participation from the entire team.

## **What Happens If It's Not Working?**

You and your teleworkers must understand that not everyone who tries telework is successful. Some reasons the teleworker may need to end his/her participation in the program are:

- Uncontrollable distractions: The neighbors and family just don't understand that while the employee is working at home, they are unavailable for other activities.
- Cabin fever: Being at home 24 hours a day becomes unacceptable.
- Productivity and quality of work: The employee's productivity and/or the quality of the employee's work has declined since the employee has been participating in the telework program.
- Desire or need to be around people: The employee discovers that the need for social interaction is a critical factor in his/her life.

If it becomes apparent that the employee must end his/her participation in the project, don't hold a grudge. Help the employee to understand that he/she is valuable to the agency and request they resume regular office hours.

## **Employee Visibility**

A key concern for teleworkers is less visibility and its impact on upward mobility in the organization. Be aware of your teleworker's desire to maintain his/her standing in the work group and work with them to maintain their visibility. Advise people both up and down the agency structure of the teleworker's achievements.

## **The Do's**

Trust your teleworker.

Encourage good organizational skills.

Develop your teleworker.

Require participation in the surveys and evaluation process.

Encourage goal setting.

Give appropriate and timely feedback.

Take the time to plan.

Manage by measuring results -- ask for a weekly status report.

Communicate regularly.

Use telework as an opportunity to strengthen your management skills.

Be flexible and creative; this is a learning experience.

Expect changes.

Take telework very seriously.

Delegate assignments equitably among your teleworkers and non-teleworkers.

Plan meetings when your teleworkers can participate.

Include your teleworkers in day-to-day activities.

Be prepared if telework does work well to allow the employee greater frequency of telework.

Be prepared to terminate an employee's participation if telework is not working.

## **The Don'ts**

Don't conduct curfew checks.

Don't call your teleworker every hour to check on progress.

Don't ignore your teleworker.

Don't ask for constant status reports.

Don't expect unrealistic deadlines for projects.

Don't neglect problems.

Don't set unattainable goals.

Don't manage by close supervision.

Don't expect perfection, there will be adjustments.

Don't give telework a bad name.

Don't expect everyone to be a successful teleworker.

# **Whom to Call for Assistance and Support**

Each agency has a designated telework coordinator to assist you in all aspects of the State's telework program. Your telework coordinator is:

Name

Work Phone