

# *Telecommuting is a solution!*

Employers want to attract and keep good workers. So here are seven tips for developing a telecommuting program for your business.



1. **Establish guidelines for when (and how long) telecommuting is acceptable.** These guidelines should be based on your business, your comfort level and your employees' needs, yet must be general enough to withstand changes in your workforce. For example you may decide that an employee can work from home to stay with an ill child or spouse, but you may not want an employee to work from home to take care of young children. (Advocacy groups such as ITAC discourage allowing long-term babysitting as a reason to telecommute. They recommend that an employee with a temporary daycare problem work a different shift that day, or request time off.)

Similarly, you'll need to decide how many employees can telecommute at one time, and whether it is feasible to have full-time telecommuters. Also, you'll need to oversee or assign a manager for your telecommuting program, to maintain integrity and accountability.

2. **Have ways of making sure expectations are met.** If you allow your employees to telecommute several days a week, you'll need to assign tasks and chart how progress can be measured and evaluated on a daily basis. You'll also want to use email or scheduled phone conversations, to ensure not only that the task or project is completed but also that the work is meeting expectations.
3. **Trust your workers by focusing on the results, not the process.** You can't have an employee telecommute, and then spend each hour worrying about whether he is actually working. It's much more important that the telecommuter got that budget revision to you at 8 a.m. Wednesday, than it is to worry about whether he or she was watching TV at 3 p.m. on Tuesday.
4. **Don't cut corners on technology.** You can't have workers telecommuting with substandard computer equipment that will limit their output and effectiveness. Even if your budget is tight (and whose isn't?), you need to take some responsibility for the PC workstation and other equipment they need at home, such as assisting with the purchase of a modem or printer.
5. **Don't cut corners on ergonomics.** After some past controversy, the federal Occupational Health and Safety Administration clarified its standards, saying it won't inspect home offices and won't hold employers liable for telecommuters' home offices. However, employers are required to keep records of telecommuter injuries suffered at home, and could be found liable in employee damage claims. Employers should be aware of the conditions of their employees' home offices, having telecommuters bring in photos, if possible. If the employee's job involves "high-volume keyboarding," the employer should consider providing an ergonomically correct chair as well as a workstation – since you would provide those items at your workplace.
6. **Provide access to accompany intranet or extranet.** An intranet is an internal company Web site; an extranet is an extension of the internal site to selected outsiders such as partners and vendors. Your telecommuters need access to internal documents and their own company email to do their jobs. Also, if the telecommuter is involved in a team project, make sure there are project checklists available so he or she can mark tasks as complete.
7. **Make the most of face-to-face contact.** Even if you allow employees to telecommute as often as they wish, you need to have periodic "face" time with them. Many veteran telecommuters today choose to work at least one day a week in the office. Key meetings and company events should be scheduled to allow them to be there in person. Yet telecommuters must also be flexible enough to leave home when necessary for unscheduled meetings. It's a delicate balance: The telecommuter needs to feel that he or she is not missing out on what's going on at the office. And those at the office need to feel that the telecommuter is "pulling his/her weight."