

LIFE TIME

Ohio State University Extension Helping You Balance Work and Family

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Working at home: The wave of the future?

• By Jan Thompson, Associate Professor, Work/Life/Health Issues, Ohio State University Extension

The workplace may have a changed look for more and more workers—a home-like look. Since the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, more employers are being asked to consider telecommuting. The International Telework Association and Council (ITAC) reports a four-fold increase in employers and employees wanting to know more about “working from home” since Sept. 11. In fact, some experts say the events of 9/11 may be pushing telecommuting to a new level. According to a human resources consultant, “We’re going to see telecommuting explode in the next 10 years. Technology is allowing it, and traffic is demanding it. And, it can be a great retention tool.”

According to the ITAC annual survey, telecommuting is up 17 percent over last year. More than two-thirds of these workers say they have greater job satisfaction and are more committed to their organization than when they were not telecommuting. Teleworkers also said that working at home interferes less with their personal activities than working in an office—even though they are apt to work before and after normal working hours as well as on weekends. Families benefit too. Teleworkers said their families experience less conflict and have a better quality of life.

If you are considering telecommuting, look at what has worked and what hasn’t. According to Work/Family Directions, a work/life consulting firm, an out-of-control workload is a huge barrier to successful telecommuting. If you contend with lots of last-minute requests, very little planning, constant emergencies and seem to always have too much to do, telecommuting may not work for you.

According to Gil Gordon, an expert in teleworking, there are some qualities that contribute to telecommuting success. See if you can answer “yes” to these questions: Do you enjoy working alone, trust your manager, keep your word? Are you self-disciplined and independent? Do you make good decisions, complete tasks on schedule and keep others informed? Do you have good communications skills and are you comfortable with technology? And, do you have a safe, quiet place at home to work as well as a childcare arrangement during working hours?

If your “yes” list is long, talk with your manager or employer about being part of a telecommuting pilot project. Experts say a telecommuting project is more apt to succeed if it’s first planned and piloted. That way adjustments can be made to make sure all parties involved are satisfied with the effort. A project manager at Schering-Plough says the company started a pilot project with 25 workers. Employees were monitored, tracked, and the project was modified. Now the company has 400 telecommuting employees. More than 25 percent have been promoted since they started telecommuting.

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From the Experts

What makes telecommuting successful?

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) asked 62 telecommuting experts what was “essential” for a successful program. These items were the overwhelming choices:

- Clear, measurable goals.
- An executive champion.
- A program coordinator.
- Training for managers.
- The same performance appraisals as for non-teleworkers.
- An assessment of the employee’s needs and technical needs.
- A formal system for technical support.

— “Expert Consensus on Recommended Practices for Telework Program Success,” GSA, September 2001



Simplify your life

• By Cynthia R. Shuster, M.S., Family and Consumer Sciences Agent, Perry County, Associate Professor, Ohio State University Extension

Nearly half of Americans feel they don't have enough time. Yet there are those who have discovered that the gift of life is realized one brief moment at a time. It's time to slow down and start savoring life—it's not as hard as you think.

It's time to simplify. That means being aware of how you spend money, time, and energy. Here are 10 easy steps to get you started in simplifying your life and finding precious "me time."

Here are some tips to do just that:

- Start the day right. Save all that frantic wasted time used in the morning to prepare for the day. Spend the night before preparing for the next day.

- Declutter your space. It takes energy to keep possessions in working order or dusted. Get rid of the stuff that's broken or missing a part.

- Learn to say "no." Don't overload your schedule with more tasks, more jobs, more volunteer time. It's OK to say no.

- Turn off the TV. We waste too much time sitting in front of the TV. Curb how many hours the TV is on. And before you pick up the remote control, ask yourself if there are activities to share with the family, like a museum visit or play, that you've been putting off.

- Commit to No. 1. When the demands of work, parenthood, or household chores get you down, it's time to

schedule a date with yourself. Whether it's every Sunday night or 20 minutes each morning, the important thing is to make a plan and stick to it.

- Find a sanctuary. Escape to a place to enjoy peaceful solitude.

- Be spontaneous. Spontaneity is key to feeling like you're in control of your own destiny. Every once in a while, a change in routine can spark your spirits and your energy.

- Live beneath your means. Did you know that 80 percent of America's self-made millionaires are frugal? If you want to achieve economic independence, try buying only what you can afford, not what you think you need. See how long you can go without cashing a check, charging on credit, or buying anything.

- Rewrite the course of your day. When the newspaper's horoscope doesn't tell you what you want to hear, write your own, using words that make you feel great. Or start jotting down phrases you like on slips of paper, put them in a box, and pick as many as you need to start the day.

- Listen to your body. You know what your biological clock prefers. Indulge it and watch your productivity grow.

From "Life Savors: How to Simplify Your Life," Ohio State University Extension, <http://ohioline.osu.edu/flm01/FS21.html>

Trends in work/family issues

• By Cindy Bond-Zielinski, Family and Consumer Sciences/Community Development Agent, Program Coordinator Learning Center East, Ohio State University Extension

According to Robert W. Drago, professor of labor studies and industrial relations at Penn State University, upcoming work/family trends include:

- **Sequencing.** People are timing their parenting responsibilities either before or after the core years when they have to make it as professional. They don't try to do both at once. This is particularly true for women in academia, law and accounting.

- **Technology.** Technology allows people to work 24/7, but cell phones, beepers, e-mail, the Internet and PalmPilots are being used not only for work but in family life. A related issue: the private use of e-mail at work. If employees answer work-related e-mail at home, then they're going to answer family-related e-mail at work. If employees are to be available 24 hours a day for work, they also must be available to their families during that time.

- **Eldercare.** Eldercare issues are expected to become a high priority in about four to five years.

- **Afterschool care.** Virtually all afterschool care programs are designed for younger children. For working parents, there's no reason that ceiling should be at third or fourth grade. Parents often worry more about teenagers than they do about young kids.

Source: *Positive Leadership*, Penn State University, Robert W. Drago, PhD

Take steps to avoid overconfidence, increase accuracy

• Jan Thompson, Associate Professor, Work/Life/Health Issues, Ohio State University Extension

Do some people think they know more than they actually do? Are they overconfident? Wesley Hutchinson, marketing professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, offers tips on how to protect yourself from the danger zones that lead to overconfidence:

- If you're dealing with an issue where there is some uncertainty, assume at least a 20 percent chance that you're wrong. That will lead you to think of "Plan B," improving your decision-making process.

- Recognize that you're not an expert about everything. Research shows that people who have expertise in one area tend to over-generalize to other areas. "Expertise is domain-specific. As people move beyond their immediate area of expertise, their ability drops off sharply, but often their confidence doesn't," Hutchinson said.

- Play the odds rather than try to beat them. Don't be overconfident about trying to influence things out of your control. Test your opinions by looking for information that will confirm that

you're wrong. "Often, we decide something is right and then just look for information that will support our view. But it's crucial to go out of your way to look for facts that challenge your beliefs," Hutchinson said.

Finally, create external sources of memory. That's because your memory isn't flawless. The more you create external sources of memory (like getting it down in writing) the more accurate you can be.

Source: *Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania*, May 2001