

MANAGEMENT ISSUES TO BE AWARE OF:

The following are some typical issues for supervisors of teleworkers. The recommendations are provided as suggestions on an as needed basis. They are not meant to imply a required way of doing things. You should pick, choose, and blend what works for you.

A. Utilizing the Telework Report

Many jobs don't necessarily have a concrete work product. The work may be part of a long-term project in which a concrete product is not due until the end of the project, or the work may involve developing relationships, reading, reviewing, studying, conceptualizing, etc. None of these results are a concrete product. Even with concrete products, the supervisor may not have a basis or simply not know how to determine quality, quantity, or time requirements for the completion of a given assignment. For these situations, a Telework Report can be the solution.

The Telework Report is an email that is completed by the employee and sent to the supervisor. The report identifies specific work products or assignments the employee expects to produce while teleworking (pre-telework email) and what was accomplished (post-telework email). This report is sent to the supervisor before each telework session and after each telework session. The report can help the supervisor develop accurate norms and expectations about what type of assignments or tasks are good for teleworking, assess the level of productivity, and prioritizing workload.

B. Staying Connected to the Office

Supervisors should make the extra effort to assist teleworkers in staying connected to the office. Where possible, supervisors should:

- ◆ ensure that teleworkers receive all office communications in a timely fashion;
- ◆ schedule meetings on days the teleworker is in the office, or set up meetings to include the teleworker via audio-conference, video-conference, or other electronic means;
- ◆ ensure that the teleworker remains aware of and involved in official events, decision making, discussions, and planning; and
- ◆ have an office discussion including teleworkers and co-workers on ways to preserve communications and teamwork.

C. Prevention of Morale Problems

Over the years, we have heard a lot of concern from supervisors about possible morale problems and/or grievances from employees who are not selected for the program. Some supervisors go so far as to rule out the program for everyone because of such concerns.

Interestingly enough, there have been few reports of grievances filed over non-selection for teleworking programs. One approach for reducing the possibility of morale or grievance problems is to determine a clear set of criteria for selection (even if the criteria include subjective

determinations of personal qualities such as independence), discuss them openly with the whole staff, and provide opportunities for non-selectees to develop the necessary criteria and enter the program later. This not only gives the staff a clear awareness of the selection, but also provides an incentive for improved performance among non-selectees.

You and your teleworker should have a positive working relationship before beginning teleworking. If you identify areas of non-performance, lack of trust, or dependency on direct supervision, it's prudent to wait until these problems are resolved before allowing the employee to telework. You should explain the true reasons for denying teleworking opportunities, the necessary steps to improve the employee's performance, and the time frame for re-evaluation. If the criteria are met, the employee can begin teleworking. This positive approach gives employees the responsibility for showing their suitability rather than requiring you to prove that the employees are not suitable.

A common "what if" expressed by supervisors is a situation in which two employees apply for teleworking and both have acceptable job performance appraisals, but the supervisor is uncomfortable with a subjective quality (e.g., does the job well, but needs oversight) of one employee. The supervisor should select the independent employee for the program and realize that this is an opportunity to work with the other employee on the subjective inadequacy. Also, the supervisor can motivate the non-selected employee by offering to reconsider the application if the problem performance is remedied within a certain time frame. Alternatively, the supervisor can allow this employee into the program on the provisional basis, mutually agreed upon in writing, that if performance is not adequate after a designated time period, the employee will be removed from the program.

D. Feedback for Teleworkers

Employees want to know if they're doing a good job, and they also want to know if they aren't meeting your expectations. Feedback is important for all employees, but it's especially important for teleworkers. Many teleworkers are concerned that they won't receive any feedback and that one day their supervisors will tell them that they need to return to the main office.

Here are a few points to keep in mind when giving feedback after teleworking begins:

- ◆ Make feedback a regular, scheduled component of your relationship with the employee.
- ◆ If there's a reason for unscheduled feedback, do your best to give the feedback soon after you notice the reason for the feedback.
- ◆ Give the feedback in private and make sure you have time to talk.
- ◆ Remember to balance positive and negative feedback, so that teleworkers don't feel their entire performance is suffering. Keep the feedback in perspective.
- ◆ Limit the discussion to a few key areas at a time. By limiting the discussion, teleworkers can assimilate the information and focus on what they're doing well and on what they can

improve. If you give comments on too many topics, teleworkers may feel overwhelmed with deficiencies or may not believe your praise.

- ◆ Discuss the work not the worker. Also, stick to actions for which you have first-hand knowledge, not what a co-worker has observed.
- ◆ Be direct about expressing your expectations; don't play a guessing game with the teleworker. For example, if you must schedule a meeting on a teleworking day, tell the teleworker whether you expect him or her to attend in person or via audio conference, or that it's not necessary to attend.
- ◆ Respect the teleworking arrangement. Make sure your employees (teleworking or not) know that you take the teleworking arrangement seriously and that you expect them to as well. Avoid teasing teleworkers about "goofing off", "getting away", etc. Teleworkers may already be anxious about how their teleworking is viewed.

Adapted from Maryland's Department of Budget and Management
<http://www.dbm.maryland.gov/employees/telework/Pages/TeleworkHome.aspx>