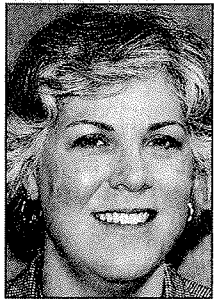


More employers embrace option of telecommuting

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Have you thought about starting or expanding a telecommuting program for your employees? According to a recent survey by



Robin Onaclea

WorldatWork, the number of telecommuters in the U.S. increased by 39 percent in the last two years. This increase is likely the result of high energy costs, improved telecommunications technology, and the workforce's increasing desire for flexibility.

One local company is actively growing its work-from-home program. About 10 percent of employees at Enterprise Rent-A-Car's call center in downtown Eugene work from home. Executive Director Linda Dagg said the program continues to expand. "With fewer people working in our office, we've reduced costs for maintaining workspaces in our building. It's also an opportunity to have a more highly motivated employee with stronger performance. Plus, our employees working from home save money on clothing, dry cleaning and transportation. This has led to strong retention and increased morale."

Dagg advises employers, who want to start a telecommuting program, to have a solid structure in place to support the employee at home. "Make sure they have people to contact when they need help. Give them the tools and equipment to do their jobs well. Provide preparatory training for at-home employees, including how to

manage distractions and to set boundaries for your loved ones."

The State of Oregon has a telecommuting policy designed to promote energy savings in all state agencies. University of Oregon Employment Manager Christine Lonigan said not many of its employees telecommute, but she has observed increased job satisfaction among those who do. "Employees who telecommute generally spend some days at home and some days on campus each week. In general, positions that require focused thought and use of technology seem to work best. This would include writing, editing and design positions."

"Not every employee can work successfully in a telecommuting situation," Lonigan said. Work style and history must support the demands of the arrangement and productivity must be measurable. Lonigan suggests that if employers implement a telecommuting policy, they make it clear that they reserve the right to revert to a traditional work setting based on operational needs and employee productivity. The University of Oregon has a detailed telework policy available on its Web site at <http://hr.uoregon.edu/policy/telecommuting.html>.

Other telecommuting tips for employers include:

- ◆ Create a formal telecommuting policy that clarifies both the supervisor's and employee's responsibilities, discusses how equipment needs will be met, and specifies how sensitive or confidential data will be handled.
- ◆ Provide a written telecommuting agreement to be signed by both the supervisor and employee to ensure that both are clear about the arrangement's parameters.
- ◆ Let employees try telecommuting for a short time before committing to a permanent arrangement.

◆ Consider offering telecommuting as an option only for employees who have been with your company for six months to a year, or to employees who have the best performance evaluations.

◆ Establish clear communication guidelines. Do you expect employees to check in daily or twice a week?

◆ Identify appropriate telework tasks and jobs. A particular job may not appear to be compatible with telecommuting, but portions of the job may be if they are broken out into specific activities.

◆ Look for ideal teleworkers who will possess some of the following characteristics: independent, self-starter, organized, goal-oriented and responsible.

◆ Assign a supervisor who is results-oriented, a good communicator, and provides timely and constructive feedback.

◆ Opt for a balance of telecommuting and on-site work. (This may reassure employers who have concerns about telecommuting, although this arrangement can reduce potential energy and space savings.)

The Oregon Department of Energy has a number of online resources to assist in establishing telework programs, including information on Business Energy Tax Credits, a comprehensive "Step by Step Guide to Launching a Telework Program", and a sample telework policy and agreement. These can be found at: www.oregon.gov/ENERGY/TRANS/Telework/telehm.shtml.

If you have questions about training your work force, contact Robin Onaclea, business service coordinator at Lane Workforce Partnership, at robino@laneworkforce.org or 682-7224.