



## **Gas gouged? Try telecommuting**

As pump prices approach \$4 a gallon, more seen opting to work from home

By Eve Tahmincioglu

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Sean, a software engineer for a telecommunications company in Pennsylvania, has always wanted to telecommute but he didn't push the issue with his boss even though other workers were telecommuting because of family obligations.

But gas prices finally drove him to the brink. He commutes 25 miles each way to work and recently saw his \$45 a week gas expenditures jump to \$60 a week.

"I figured guys in my office are already working from home for family reasons, so I thought I was entitled to work from home regardless, and couple that with \$4 a gallon gas," he says, "I figured I had a pretty good argument."

Turns out he did. Sean, who didn't want his full name used, approached his manager with his case last month and now telecommutes once a week.

"I've been watching gas prices fluctuate and I knew it was only going to get worse as we headed for the warmer months so I decided to ask if I could work from home," he explains.

Like so many employees, Sean was reluctant to request telecommuting. "I don't like to ask for a lot," he admits. But, he adds, "If gas keeps going up I think I may have to ask for another work-from-home day."

It's time for workers across the country to stand up and demand their right to telecommute!

Since many companies are either laying people off or keeping a tight grip on the purse strings and wages in this economy, it's harder for managers to argue against telecommuting as they see their employees and themselves hammered by escalating fuel prices.

And it seems employers are more receptive to the idea.

Last month, the House Speaker of the state of Georgia told state employees to start working from home one day a week as a way to fight high prices at the pump.

“Everyone’s concerned about gas prices right now,” says Clelia Davis, a spokeswoman for Speaker Glenn Richardson.

By telecommuting one day a week, employees can save 20 percent on their gas bill, she adds. The telecommuting will be done on a rolling basis during the week so that there’s always someone in the offices.

Gas prices hit a new record last week, closing in on \$4 a gallon.

So go ahead, walk into your boss’ office right now and ask to talk about telecommuting. You could also wait for raise time, or your monthly or yearly evaluation to bring up the topic, but time is money.

For those of you who can’t work remotely, like retail salespeople and health care professionals, you could suggest changing your shift so that you work three 12-hour days a week instead of an 8-hour shift five days a week.

Also, if you’re up for a new job you should think about negotiating days at home as part of your compensation package, especially if you don’t get the salary you want.

When John Sauer was considering taking a higher level position at the company he’s been with for 16 years, Pitney Bowes Inc., the first thing he asked the hiring manager was if he could telecommute.

He was working as an employee advocate at the firm’s Shelton, Conn. location that was eight miles from his home, but taking on a promotion would mean he’d have to work at the headquarters in Stanford, which was 31 miles away.

“I told the hiring director ‘I’m very interested in the position and I’m a very good fit, but I’m not applying if I can’t telecommute,’” he explains.

### **TELECOMMUTING TIPS**

**Katy Piotrowski, a career counselor and author of “The Career Coward’s Guide to Interviewing,” offers her top tips to use when you’re ready to have that talk with your manager about telecommuting:**

- 1. “Keep track of your activities, and make notes about which tasks would benefit from more concentrated focus, or wouldn’t be negatively impacted through at-a-distance, rather than face-to-face, communication.”**
- 2. “Anticipate which of your responsibilities may suffer from working remotely. If there’s a weekly staff meeting you’re regularly a part of, what’s your strategy for continuing to be a**

part of it — working in the office that day, or participating via a phone conference?”

**3. “List a number of your past successes with working remotely,” if you have any. “Have you traveled for work or personal reasons, and were able to keep things at the office on track? Have you worked remotely before with a different employer? Document evidence of your successes.”**

**4. Offer to telecommute on a trial basis. “If there are no major concerns,” you could say, “I’d like to experiment with trying a work-from-home arrangement, to increase my productivity and to cut down on the impact on the environment of commuting. Would you be willing to let me try this for a short period of time, say two or three months, to see how it’s going?” Work out a timeframe and schedule.”**

**5. Don’t forget to follow up. “Troubleshoot your boss’s concerns and report back with new ideas. If you’ve received a, ‘no’, request that you might revisit the idea in a few months, after you’ve both had a chance to reconsider it.”**

They struck a deal, which include him working for six months in Stanford while he went through training and after that he’d only have to come to headquarters two to three days a week.

“I’m saving at least \$60 a week,” he says, “and it makes a difference on the environment.”

According to Elizabeth H. Pytko, a spokeswoman for Pitney Bowes, the company has always had a liberal policy when it comes to commuting options, but there has been an increase in employees taking advantage of telecommuting because of gas prices.

Some workers are just getting work-at-home gigs right out of the gate because the cost of commuting is just too high.

Caryn Murray started getting contracting work through oDesk — an outsourcing marketplace for contractors and companies — in February writing Web site content from her home.

Given that her husband who is a sheet-metal apprentice now commutes and hour to Syracuse, N.Y. from their home in Cayuga, for a cost of \$150 a week, they just couldn’t afford more in commuting costs. “We save a lot of money because I’m working from home, and it gives me flexibility for my family,” she says.

If you decide telecommuting is for you, don’t just bang your boss’ door down and tell her or him you’re heading home with your laptop.

Bring as much data as you can to the table when you sit down with managers. Explain how much more you’re spending on gas each week, and if possible, compare that to your recent raise and how rising fuel costs have diminished any gains in your pocket.

For example, if you commute five days a week, 60 miles round trip each day, you pay about \$56.25 a week based on a per gallon price of \$3.75 and an average gas mileage of

20 per gallon. That's nearly \$3,000 you're spending on gas per year, compared to \$2,100 a year when gas prices were \$2.75, for example.

So, if you make, let's say, \$50,000 and you get a 3 percent raise this year, you'll see a \$1,500 increase in your annual pay, most of which will go right to oil companies. Given that, it's in your economic best interest to cut down your commute as much as possible.

Katy Piotrowski, a career counselor and author of "The Career Coward's Guide to Interviewing", advises you do some homework and "think through ways that you can truly be more productive by working from home."