



CIOs Should Expand Telecommuting

By Eric Chabrow
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IT executives that allow workers to telecommute are likely to see benefits beyond what meets the eye.

Soaring fuel prices that take an increasing bite out of employees' wallets should prompt more enterprises to allow workers to telecommute. Because of their business and technology savvy, CIOs ought to take the lead in establishing telecommuting programs at their companies.

It might take some convincing. CIO Insight Research's mobility survey, published last month (go.cioinsight.com/teleworkfinding), showed that just over half of surveyed IT leaders said their companies discouraged full-time telecommuting. That stat is disappointing.

Some managers contend it's hard to supervise workers remotely. But managers who can't supervise remote workers likely don't do a great job managing in the office, either, says Gil Gordon, who's helped establish corporate telework programs since 1982. "The key to managing knowledge workers is to manage with your brain, not your eyeballs," he says.

Obviously, not all jobs are tailored for telecommuting, but many knowledge-based workers can toil away remotely. And the payback for qualified employees is real. At computer maker Sun Microsystems, more than half of its 19,000 employees telecommute at least part time, with each telecommuting worker saving, on average, 104 hours a year—the equivalent of 2-1/2 weeks of vacation. Plus, they saved nearly \$1,800 annually in gasoline costs and wear and tear on their cars.

Most knowledge workers don't receive fat paychecks. Based on the \$1,800 savings Sun workers averaged, an executive assistant who earns \$35,000 a year after taxes—based on results of a Salary.com search—would realize the equivalent of a 5 percent pay hike by telecommuting part time. Imagine how much money such workers would save if they worked three, four or five days a week from home.

Telecommuting also helps employers by attracting and retaining staff, says Paul Edwards, who along with his wife, Sarah, literally wrote the book on telecommuting in their 1986 tome, *Working From Home*. Indeed, about 30 percent of the 377 full-time workers surveyed in May by Telework Exchange, a public-private partnership that promotes telework, said they're now seeking new jobs closer to home.

Having fewer employees working in offices provides real savings to employers. Sun didn't have to find office space for 7,215 workers in 2006 because of its telecommuting program, saving the company nearly \$68 million that year.

Companies that promote telecommuting aid the environment, too. Sun reckons its telecommuting and related programs eliminate nearly 30,000 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions a year—the equivalent of permanently removing 6,700 cars from the road each year.

There's really no excuse for companies not to promote telecommuting, and it's time for CIOs to lead their companies' efforts to do just that.