

WORKFORCE HORIZONS

Planning Tomorrow's Workforce Today

Louisiana Department of Civil Service

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TIPS ON TELECOMMUTING

Modern technology with email, fax, cell phones, lap-top computers and pc's, and digital palm-tops is making telecommuting a viable option as a flexible work alternative. Employees can work at home instead of in the office. They can communicate or send in work electronically and may only physically visit the office on rare occasions. Aside from providing employees with an opportunity to better balance work and personal life commitments, telecommuting can save costs for the organization in terms of office space and support expenses such as electricity, phones, and office equipment depending on whether the employee telecommutes full time or part-time.

However, telecommuting does offer some challenges because it is a very different work environment for employees and

WORKFORCE PLANNING MAXIM OF THE DAY

“A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done.” – Dwight D. Eisenhower

supervisors. One problem is the “invisibility” of the employee. How will a supervisor evaluate an employee’s work or even know whether the employee is working when they do not often physically see the employee at work? Will the employee have adequate access to his or her supervisor or other agency resources to answer questions or receive proper guidance? Will the employee become too isolated and “out of touch” to be effective?

Obviously some jobs lend themselves to telecommuting more than others. But here is some advice taken from Shirley Chan’s article “The Invisible Factors of Telecommuting” in the July 26, 2007 online version of Workforce Management.

Develop a written telecommuting contract. This contract will spell out the obligations of the employee and of the organization and the supervisor or manager to whom the telecommuting employee reports. The contract should include:

How often and how long the employee will telecommute- Will the employee telecommute every day or only certain specified days of the week or month, or perhaps specified time slots in a workday?

How often and by what means should the telecommuting employee communicate with the office – A regular schedule might be established for emailing or calling in or making physical appearances in the office. A protocol for how to submit work or obtain necessary approvals from the supervisor should be included as well as names of persons to contact in various instances including when the supervisor is unavailable.

How will the employee's work be evaluated- This is a key point because the supervisor will not observe the employee directly. Jobs that involve deadlines or submitting reports, completing projects or cases, or accomplishing measurable tasks with concrete products lend themselves best to telecommuting. Work logs might also be kept. But whatever the work product, performance measures with tangible outcomes and a clear description of what is expected and when and how feedback and evaluation will occur should be spelled out in the contract.

Guidelines on Confidentiality – Often employees are dealing with information that is confidential. Protocols and guidelines should be included in the telecommuting contract that will indicate what information is to be kept confidential and how the employee will maintain its confidentiality.

Who should be involved in drawing up the contract? Obviously the employee and direct supervisor should be involved and the Human Resources Office. The Department attorney might also be consulted.

DEALING WITH CHANGE SUCCESSFULLY

Today, change is something all organizations must deal with continuously. In fact, managers and employees have become overwhelmed and even cynical about the seemingly endless parade of fads and “new” programs. Yet despite all the interest in change, many efforts at organizational change fail. Why?

In her article “Good-bye, Command and Control,”¹ Margaret Wheatley² indicates that one reason is a prevailing leadership style that places too much emphasis on control from the top. This leadership style views the organization as a machine and employees as parts of the machine that can be controlled, predicted and managed successfully if only the correct work design or plan is developed and followed. Change is dealt with by trying to re-engineer, change job descriptions, retrain, and shuffle people around, developing more and more complex plans to handle any situation that comes up.

One problem with this approach is that you cannot predict every possible eventuality. A complex plan becomes outmoded before it is implemented and must be revised so often, employees begin to feel the whole re-engineering process is a waste of time. The fact is that human organizations operate more like biological organisms than machines. They self-organize from within in order to handle the environment.

What is needed is not more control from above, but rather an effort to build a capacity in employees to push the organization forward and achieve its goals using their own initiative to find creative solutions. Then as each new wave of change comes, you can depend on them having the initiative and creativity to meet it.

People can self-organize around a purpose and organization as long as they know clearly what the purpose is and believe in it and the organization. In any organization where employees are committed to its mission, the employees can be counted on to exercise initiative based on their desire to contribute.

They will observe what is going on, see what needs to happen and do it. They will establish networks and communicate with and use other people in the organization as needed to create and invent solutions.

The key to making organizations self-organizing and capable of changing successfully is establishing commitment and loyalty from employees. This is not achieved by monetary incentives as is shown by the fact that some of the greatest levels of commitment occur in nonprofit organizations from volunteers. Ms. Wheatley points out that **“The organizations that people love to be in are ones that have a sense of history and identity and purpose.”**

So, how do you establish this commitment and loyalty in your employees? Here is Ms. Wheatley’s advice:

1. Give them a meaningful purpose or mission and clearly define it
2. Give them some autonomy; let them get the job done
3. Allow them to contribute
4. Earn their trust; be honest with them
5. Set an example; practice what you preach

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“To measure whether a change effort has been successful, we need to ask, Are people in the organization more committed to being here now than they were at the beginning of this effort?” – Margaret Wheatley

¹ Taken from Leader to Leader, Frances Hesselbein and Paul M. Cohen, ed. Jossey-Bass 1999

² Margaret Wheatley is a consultant, speaker and author and is co-founder of the Berkana Institute, a nonprofit research foundation supporting organizational change.

WORKFORCE FACTS

- Of the 100 largest economic entities in the world, only 46 are countries; 54 are business corporations.³
- American workers spend an average of 46 minutes round-trip commuting to and from work each day.⁴
- Only 4% of American workers take mass transportation to work⁴
- 50% of American women in 2007 say that even if they had the option of staying at home and taking care of house and family full-time, they would rather have a job outside the home. This is up from 42% in 2005.⁴

³ Edersheim, Elizabeth Haas. “Peter Drucker’s ‘Unfinished Chapter’: The Role of the CEO.” Leader To Leader, No. 45, Summer 2007

⁴ Source: 2007 Gallup Poll

CREDITS

Editor: Max Reichert, Workforce Planning Assistant
Division Administrator (email: max.reichert@la.gov)

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Purpose: The purpose of the Workforce Horizons is to educate readers about workforce planning issues and best practices, inform them about upcoming Civil Service workshops and training related to workforce planning and to provide practical job aids to assist agencies with workforce planning.

Comments and submissions: We welcome questions about workforce planning and suggestions for improvements to the newsletter as well as submissions of articles about what your agency is doing in workforce planning. Questions, comments, and requests to be added to the distribution list for the newsletter should be sent to the editor.

Current and Back Issues are accessible under “Workforce Planning Newsletter” in the HR Reference section of the Civil Service web page at www.civilservice.louisiana.gov