Teleworking Tips for Employees

TELEWORKING FUNDAMENTALS

<u>Assess</u> **whether teleworking is right for you**. Successful teleworkers are:

1. Able to work with minimal direct supervision
2. Organized in their work practices
3. Able to plan for their work (with some managerial input)
4. Able to meet schedules and deadlines
5. Effective with time management
6. Effective communicators
7. Comfortable with technology

Image credit: Valley Metro

Review your agency's teleworking policy and related IT policies. These policies likely include information and guidelines related to:

1. Eligibility,
2. Scheduling,
3. Timekeeping,
4. Dos and don'ts of teleworking,
5. Workspace requirements,
6. IT support, information security, and data privacy, and
7. Equipment usage and expenses, e.g. for printing access and cost.

Ensure that you have participated in any required teleworking orientations or technology assessments. For example, you will likely need to be able to perform the following actions to successfully telework:

1. Connect to your agency's VPN,
2. Open and use your agency's collaboration software (such as Microsoft Teams),
3. Use your camera and microphone for meetings,
4. Create, accept, and open calendar appointments,
5. Download files from a server or web.

There may be additional position-specific functions that you need to be able to perform; check with your manager to make sure that you know all that will be required of you.

If you have a question that is not answered by your agency's policy or training, discuss it with your manager and document the discussion in writing.

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COMMUNICATION & EXPECTATIONS

Discuss and document your manager's expectations for the following areas:

1. Communication (including frequency and format),
2. Accountability (timelines for project deliverables and check-ins),
3. Work generation (who is responsible for generating work assignments),
4. Confidentiality and privacy (related to project and/or client information),
5. Teleworking eligibility (what is required to remain eligible; teleworking frequency),
6. Work site and availability expectations (e.g., the need to be present during work hours unless PTO is used), and
7. Performance (outcomes).

Maintain connection

Check in with fellow employees to see how they are doing and help them troubleshoot issues. Consider a regularly-occurring brief morning meeting to facilitate connection. Include a video conference option in every meeting to help maintain connection with other teleworkers.

Image credit: elenabsl.Shutterstock.com

Communication is key

1. Take advantage of check-ins with your manager to air concerns or troubleshoot problems. Create a list of topics to discuss and move through them during the check-in like a regular meeting agenda. If you are organized, you will help your manager be more present for you and may be able to move through the check-in/troubleshooting session more quickly.
2. Be forthright with your manager or colleagues about any challenges to your performance and potential solutions or adjustments that need to be made. Have this conversation as soon as you are clear that you need help.
3. Reach out to co-workers to maintain relationships and collaboration generally, and in specific instances when you need help or feedback.

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PROFESSIONALISM

Employ time management best practices:
1. Create a workday routine.
2. Take the time to plan.
3. Tackle your highest priority items first.
4. Limit physical and digital distractions to facilitate success.

Remember these teleworking etiquette tips:
1. Be predictable and transparent with your calendar so your colleagues know when you are available and how they can reach you if needed. Delete old meetings or other events that you do not plan to attend.
2. Participate in video calls with your video on to help you stay engaged and reduce the likelihood of becoming distracted by email or other work. Encourage your colleagues to do the same.
3. Remain muted in conference calls until you speak. Background noise, even as minor as typing, can be distracting and seem disrespectful to others.

Manage your progress toward advancement in the following ways:
1. Document expectations in writing for reference when discussing advancement. Revisit expectations as necessary over time to reflect any changes to your situation.
2. Be clear about what is achievable for each project, work with your manager to set reasonable goals, and strive to achieve those goals. Remember that teleworking is just working outside of the office and should neither fundamentally change your role nor negatively impact job performance (and in fact may benefit it).
3. Provide progress updates to your manager at an agreed-upon frequency. If there are items or aspects of teleworking that are particularly concerning for your manager, be clear about how you are handling them.
4. Stay involved with your team and be willing to help strategize about gaps or challenges and how you and others can fill them in a balanced way.
5. Understand that you may need to be flexible regarding your teleworking schedule depending on office needs. If schedule changes occur, discuss with your manager how those changes will be balanced by changes on other days.
6. Ask for help from your manager, colleagues, or IT when needed, whether assistance with a project deliverable to upgraded technology to enhance productivity.
7. Keep track of your accomplishments and review them with your manager in meetings.
8. Humbly but confidently pass on positive feedback received from customers or other colleagues to your manager so they see external validation of your work.

Teleworking Tips for Employees

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Take breaks and aim for work/life balance

1. Aim for a balance between screen time and off-screen time to help support long-term success and happiness teleworking.
2. Incorporate time for exercise, healthy eating, and spirituality/mindfulness breaks to help you stay focused. Many teleworkers use the time formerly spent commuting to invest in their health and well-being.
3. Strive to eliminate distractions from your workspace so that you can stay on task.
4. Incorporate a minor routine to signify "arrival" to and "departure" from the workday, such as opening and closing office blinds.

Create a healthy workspace

1. Construct a workspace that allows you to do the following:
   a. Keep your head aligned
   b. Type with your wrists straight
   c. Keep your back straight
2. Ensure adequate lighting and ventilation.
3. Add an element that acts as a reminder of the office and helps signify a shift to professionalism when you arrive. This could be as simple as a candle or knickknack, as long as it signifies a change for you. Wearing at least some work clothing instead of casual clothing can also help subconsciously convey professionalism.
4. Protect your workspace from internal and external distractions as much as possible. This may mean closing windows and/or doors to mitigate outside noise, using white noise or noise canceling headphones to create a neutral sound space, shutting internet windows unrelated to work, and mitigating visual distraction (e.g., evidence of household chores) through a space separator like a screen or a hanging sheet.

Take care of your social side

Reach out to coworkers to schedule regular opportunities for social interaction and down time, e.g., virtual social hours, lunch hours, or other non-work activities. These opportunities can be purely social or intended as loose brainstorming sessions to provide space for unstructured creative time with your colleagues.

Image credit: Kay Scanlon / Los Angeles Times / Getty Images

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TROUBLESHOOTING

Think long-term

Are there aspects of teleworking that are not working for you? Think through the challenges and what you would need to address them, and let your manager know before you hit a crisis point.

Assess your technology and training needs

Are you missing any technology and/or equipment you need to be successful? Do you need training in any aspect of teleworking, such as time management, software, and/or other office functions? If so, check with your IT department about available offerings that can help meet your needs. If you still need help, schedule a meeting with your manager to discuss your needs and strategize about how to fulfill them. If possible, come to the meeting prepared with information about training opportunities and specific equipment needs to facilitate access to those opportunities and items.

Troubleshoot problem areas

Is anything not working well, whether due to process or equipment issues? Schedule a meeting with IT, your manager, or colleagues, as applicable, to examine identified issues and develop solutions.

Teleworking eligibility

If you believe you should be eligible to telework more than you are allowed to currently, discuss your preference with your manager. If that discussion does not resolve your concern, talk with someone in Human Resources.

For additional teleworking information, reference:

www.telework.gov

Employee Training in Telework Fundamentals (Telework.gov)

Microsoft Teams training videos

Image credit: Pixta

Acknowledgements

These tips draw from the resources available on Telework.gov and eWorkPlace, as well as presentations sponsored by the Association of Commuter Transportation. They were also informed by survey and focus group research with City of Tempe employees.