

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

Observations of a Telecommuter

Darin E. Hartley

Telecommuters have it easy, right? Lazing around in their pajamas, watching daytime TV, and when the computer goes down, oh well, isn't it time to make another run for chips?

The telecommuter's life is a mixed bag—of experiences, not chips. It's convenient, but it's certainly not as easy as some people think.

Darin Hartley, telecommuter, finds that it takes strong self-discipline, the ability to cope with isolation, and the prudence to draw a line between work and home life. With a little preparation, he assures us, we too can enjoy the best of both worlds.

To make working at home easier and more enjoyable, Hartley suggests a few investments in infrastructure. A good computer, fax machine, and copier (though we often take them for granted at work) are essential for telecommuting. Then there are the things that first-time telecommuters overlook. Separate phone lines, a home network, and a digital camera make work-at-home life much more efficient. And just because you work at home doesn't mean that you have to work with home's distractions. Create a home office, advises Hartley, one that provides you with privacy during the day, and one you can leave at night.

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Reprint TD070128

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Do the Right Thing

Jennifer J. Salopek

Everyone's familiar with return-on-investment, but when it comes to return-on-culture, many of us are left scratching our heads.

Salopek investigates the bottom line of ethics and morality training and talks to the experts about an effective ethics program's return-on-culture. As you might expect, when managers and employees do the right thing, the return is more than monetary.

Driven by moral or legal obligations, reputation management, change, or just the idea that good ethics is good business, more companies are creating ethics programs to create a higher level of trust, open communication, and empowered decision making. But getting employees to stay the same ethical course set by an organization takes a good deal of tact from trainers.

Ethics training has been called the softest of the soft skills. When it sets, it allows organizations to

- raise awareness that corporate values are important—strategically and culturally
- establish visibility of corporate values and ethics
- give employees the tools to make ethical decisions
- teach employees to consider the consequences of their actions.

Of course, no training program will succeed without the involvement and modeling of managers and executives. Asked the importance of their involvement, a consultant replies, "I don't have an adjective big enough."

For complete text, see page 38.

Reprint TD070138

The Customer Service Experience

Chip R. Bell

Learning occurs in unlikely places, and our teachers are often unexpected. Drawing from his daily routine, Bell of Performance Research, Dallas, employs a sharp awareness to mine wisdom from those seemingly insignificant interactions between client and merchant. What he finds will make your life easier, teach you something about yourself, and educate you on how to better serve and educate your own clients.

Here are a few ways to encourage customer learning and loyalty.

Insight-producing protocols. Creative procedures within your company can lead customers to new insights and a deeper understanding of your product.

Hard-wired wisdom. Customers have come to expect learning components built into the products they buy. Wise companies will weave that smartness into their products.

Informational follow-up. Few actions create higher customer devotion. Follow-up dispels buyer's remorse and affirms the customer's ability to recognize value.

Inclusive delight. Make learning fun. Include clients in a partnership.

Reach out to them in kind gestures, and then learn from their responses.

Surrogate roles. Build customer empathy by letting them work within your business.

"Think of your customer service as a grand learning opportunity," writes Bell. And ask yourself, what can I do to start my customers' education?

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Reprint TD070146

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Higher Learning

William Powell

T+D interviews Michael Simpson, senior consultant with Watson Wyatt, San Francisco, to discuss the rise of learning and knowledge executives. Though still not a mainstay in the corporate boardroom (at last count, there were only 250 scattered throughout U.S. corporations, a decade ago a fraction of that), their numbers are on the rise. So too is the effect they're having on employee retention, customer satisfaction, and ultimately the bottom line.

But it's not easy going for learning execs. Their position is often met with skepticism, and the pressure to show a return-on-investment can be intense.

Simpson suggests that companies establish soft metrics to support a learning executive's impact on an organization's day-to-day operations, and then apply more rigorous traditional business metrics to quiet the skeptics.

Simpson also discusses which companies can be best served by learning and knowledge executives, their role in creating a learning culture, and the dividing line between learning and knowledge executives.

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Reprint TD070151