

# In Practice

## Telecommuting Takes Off

Shortly after a massive earthquake struck Los Angeles last January, Pacific Bell found itself flooded—with phone calls. Suddenly, a slew of local businesses were interested in telecommuting. Within two weeks after the quake, the company's quickly established telecommuting hot line fielded more than 2,000 calls.

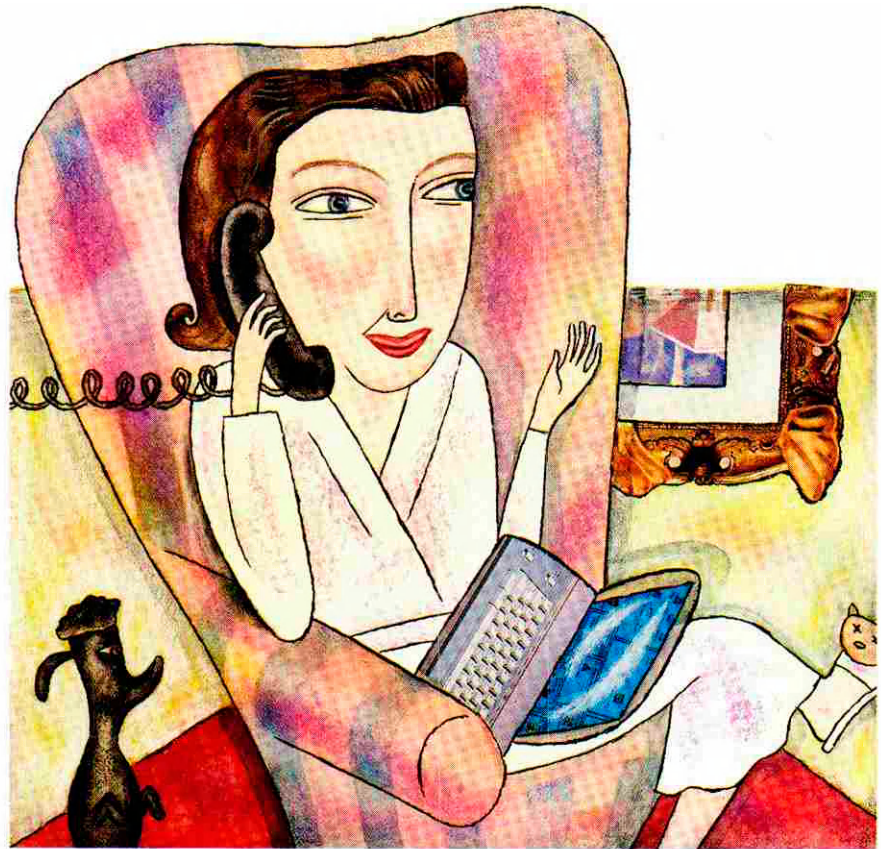
The Loma Prieta earthquake shattered much of L.A.'s famed freeway system, stranding many workers. But Pacific Bell's phone system weathered the temblor well, so veteran telecommuters, for the most part, were back at work within a day or two after the quake.

The moral of the story, according to telecommuting experts: Don't wait for a calamity. Think now about how telecommuting can benefit your organization.

To help businesses get back on their feet quickly, Pacific Bell worked with state and local officials to offer a telecommuting "relief" package to phone-company customers. The company waived installation fees for services that help people work from home and funded a telecommuting equipment loan program.

Experienced telecommuters—armed in advance with "what-to-do-if" plans—help businesses cope with the aftereffects of disasters. In addition, telecommuting enables companies to save on overhead, reduce absenteeism, cast a wider recruitment net, and retain skilled workers who would otherwise leave.

Telecommuting also treads lightly on the environment, so it's a sensible strategy for companies bound by federal law to reduce the number of vehicles that employees drive to work. And done right, telecommuting



Carolyn Fisher

enables workers to produce as well as or better than they did in the office.

Typically, employers find that telecommuters' productivity exceeds that of non-telecommuters by 10 percent to 20 percent, reports Jack Nilles, author of *Making Telecommuting Happen* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1994).

Hewlett-Packard, for example, found that employees who work from home providing technical support to customers over the telephone handle 20 percent more calls than their peers who work in the company's Response Center, reports *Business Week* in its December 27, 1993, issue.

Why? "There's no magic involved," says Nilles, president of JALA International, a management-consulting firm in Los Angeles. Telecommuters get more done because they spend more time working instead of recovering from or preparing for grueling commutes. Telecommuters experience fewer interruptions than their office-based counterparts. Telecommuters

*Want to cut costs, boost productivity, and do something nice for the environment? Encourage your firm to implement telecommuting.*

“also tend to be more motivated, because if they are not [productive], they’ll have to go back to the office,” says Nilles, who chairs the Telecommuting Advisory Council, a non-profit education group.

Even before the earthquake, concerns about traffic and air quality caused Southern California to lead other metropolitan areas in promoting telecommuting. The Los Angeles area is home to at least 600,000 telecommuters. Nationwide, about 8 million people telecommute, meaning they do their work away from their employer’s central job site at least part of the time.

Most telecommuters work from their homes, but some work at other sites. According to Carol Nolan, telecommuting manager for Pacific Bell, Southern California businesses and governments have created the following options:

**Satellite offices.** An employer leases office space near neighborhoods where many of its employees live. The employer outfits the space with desks, computers, phones, and other office equipment. Usually, employees work in satellite offices one to several days each week.

**Neighborhood work centers.** These resemble satellite offices. Several com-

panies join forces to equip and share office space near a residential area.

**Facilities exchanges.** Two geographically distant employers swap space to house each other’s employees who live nearby. In Southern California, municipal governments use this model.

Where telecommuters work matters less than how they work. Nolan offers the following guidelines for selecting good candidates for telecommuting:

**Let employees volunteer, but look for high performers who show initiative.**

▶ If telecommuting figures into the company’s strategy for complying with air-quality standards, let workers who live the farthest from the office start telecommuting first.

▶ Consider the worker’s responsibilities. (“You can’t build airplanes in your backyard,” Nolan observes.) Telecommuting suits knowledge workers who accomplish such tasks as research, analysis, reporting, and data entry.

▶ Consider the worker’s personality and personal situation. Would the person thrive in a home office?

Some companies require telecommuters to provide their own equipment. Most telecommuters—like most office workers—use computers, but fancy gizmos are not a must. “At

bare minimum, you need a pencil and paper,” says Nolan, although tools such as modems, voice mail, and file-sharing software open more options for telecommuting.

But even the snazziest technology won’t compensate for a lack of supervisor support. Managers make or break telecommuting arrangements, say both Nolan and Nilles. Management problems that fade into the figurative wallpaper of day-to-day office life suddenly come to light when telecommuting is introduced.

“Very few managers have ever been trained to manage anything,” says Nilles. Telecommuting requires managers “to grade workers based on what they produce, instead of whether they look busy.”

Most managers worry that employees won’t work once they are off site, agrees Nolan. The key, both Nilles and Nolan say, is to teach managers to manage by results. Managers and telecommuters must agree in advance on a work agenda, a delivery schedule, and a system for communicating regularly.

Nolan says many managers discover that the results-oriented approach they take with telecommuters also can boost the productivity of in-office staff.

### Training for Telecommuting

When it comes to implementing telecommuting, training “makes the difference between trial-and-error and trial-and-success,” observe Mike Gray, Noel Hodson, and Gil Gordon in *Teleworking Explained* (John Wiley & Sons, 1994).

They suggest a series of three training sessions, one for telecommuters (or “teleworkers,” as the British authors call them), one for their managers, and a joint session for both telecommuters and managers.

Training sessions for telecommuters should prepare them to

- ▶ set up a safe, secure, and ergonomically appropriate work space at home
- ▶ organize their work plans and schedules and set deadlines for “deliverables”
- ▶ deal with demands from rela-

tives, friends, and neighbors

- ▶ stay in touch with clients and co-workers
- ▶ manage their careers from off site.

Training sessions for managers should prepare them to

- ▶ manage by results instead of “eyeballing”
- ▶ brush up on setting performance standards and giving regular feedback
- ▶ help telecommuters stay connected to the office’s social and information networks
- ▶ help telecommuters develop their careers
- ▶ spot problems early and intervene effectively.

Joint training sessions for managers and telecommuters should focus on

- ▶ determining specific details of

schedules, including days and times when telecommuters will come to the office

- ▶ establishing how work will flow within and through departments
- ▶ ensuring that extra work won’t fall on in-office co-workers
- ▶ providing technical support as needed
- ▶ troubleshooting potential problems, such as equipment failures
- ▶ finishing plans for the transition to telecommuting.

Gray, Hodson, and Gordon also remind organizations not to overlook telecommuters’ training and development needs. Include them in training sessions, link them with mentors, keep them up-to-date on in-office procedures, and encourage them to attend conferences and stay abreast of developments in their fields, they advise.

And, managers of telecommuters often see the efforts of their on-site staff accelerate for another reason, Nolan adds. "People improve just so they can go home and telecommute."

For information about telecommuting, contact the Telecommuting Advisory Council, 971 Stonehill Lane, Los Angeles, CA 90049.

## The Art of Business

*From a column written by television producer Steven Bochco in the November 1993 issue of Inc.*

**“W**ithout passion, you can't do your work in the single specific way that will give it the best chance of succeeding—that is, you can't stay committed to *process*, as opposed to result....

"Process is taking the time to study your project, understand it, and figure out what you want to do with it and the best way to go about it. It's also finding the best people to help you and creating an environment that's conducive to good work. Most important, process is what lets you—and everybody alongside you—be *surprised*; it lets you discover things you hadn't figured out at the start....

"One of the things that's wrong with most television is that writers start with a result and try to jury-rig the process to accommodate it. They don't allow themselves to make discoveries along the way. And they create nothing new.

"CEOs can do the same thing—they can refuse to see when the world doesn't respond to things the way they'd decided in advance that it *should*. If you don't respect process—if you don't love it—you're pretty unlikely to see the opportunities in surprising turns of events."

## Away From It All

**Y**ou've spent two glorious weeks on your dream vacation. You've fallen in love with the place, and you're ready to relocate.

Your love affair with your vacation getaway probably is a mere summer infatuation. But, it's not a bad idea to prepare for some im-

promptu job hunting when you travel, says Karyl Innis, CEO of the Innis Company, a national career-trends consulting firm. She offers the following tips for job-seekers exploring a new area:

- ▶ Read the classified ads in the local newspaper. In general, how active is the local employment market?
- ▶ Study the Yellow Pages directory

and the local Chamber of Commerce membership directory to determine what industries dominate the area and what businesses might need your skills. Evaluate local networking possibilities by checking the listings for clubs and organizations.

- ▶ Stop by the library and peruse local business publications.
- ▶ Chat with a realtor about housing



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prices, school test scores, and other lifestyle issues. Talk to locals about the pros and cons of living in the area. Ask whether new arrivals are welcomed easily.

► Be prepared—bring your resume and a business outfit. If you don't have these items on hand and opportunity knocks, be resourceful instead—rent a computer to produce a new resume, and buy yourself an outfit.

"You don't want to squander your vacation doing research if you're not really serious about a move," says Innis. "On the other hand, if the spot seems promising, it would be silly to ignore the chance to explore job opportunities while you're on site."

### Unions Ally Across Borders for Environmental Training

The Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) has joined with the Mexican Confederation of Workers to train workers in Mexico's industrial areas in basic construction skills and hazardous-waste cleanup. In particular, the training will target the *maquiladoras*—U.S.-owned plants in Mexico, close to the U.S. border.

Known by the acronym IPEET, the new InterAmerican Partnership for Environmental Education and Training is the first effort by a U.S.-based social organization to implement environmental pacts made in conjunction with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), notes LIUNA.

In explaining this new alliance, Arthur Coia, LIUNA's general president, said the union's mission is to root out social injustice, wherever the injustice might occur. "As labor leaders," he says, "we have this moral responsibility to assist the workers in Mexico. NAFTA has given us this opportunity to get involved."

LIUNA and the Mexican Confederation of Workers already have identified 50,000 workers to be trained. At press time, training was scheduled to begin in July 1994 at three Laborers' International Union training centers in California and New Mexico.

Michael Boggs, director of international affairs for LIUNA, is one of three committee members directing

the project. Boggs says, "The idea is to have satellite centers in Mexico in the industrial centers, but the initial training will be in the U.S., but close to the border." The project's initial focus will be to "train trainers who will then go back [to Mexico] to train," Boggs notes.

IPEET is operating as a nonprofit institute. LIUNA is providing the initial funding, but also is seeking funding from other sources such as the InterAmerican Development Bank, the World Bank, and the Agency for International Development.

Other partners in this alliance are the Mexican National Institute of Public Health, the City Council of Tlalnepantla, the Mexican National Chamber of Contractors, and the National Institute for Training of Construction Workers.

For more information, contact Carl Fillichio, Laborers' International Union of North America, 905 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20006-1765; 202/942-2246.

### Feelings...Nothing More Than Feelings

Writing about the trauma of losing a job helps laid-off workers land a new position, reports a study published in the June issue of the *Academy of Management Journal*.

The study found that workers who spent 20 minutes a day for five days writing their deepest thoughts and feelings about losing their jobs were significantly more likely to find new jobs than laid-off workers in a control group.

By three months after the writing exercise, five of 20 study participants who wrote about their feelings found full-time jobs. Among a group of 43 participants who did not write daily or who wrote only about their job-search activities, only two found full-time jobs within the same time span.

By eight months after the exercise, more than half of the first group were working full-time, compared to less than 20 percent of the control group.

"These results confirm the importance of people's addressing the psychological issues of job loss," write

the study's authors, Stefanie Spera of Drake Beam Morin, Eric Buhrfeind of Andersen Consulting's Change Management Group, and James W. Pennebaker of Southern Methodist University. They suggest that newly unemployed job seekers will fare better if they grapple with their feelings before directing all of their energy into job-search activities.

### Postponed Careers in Japan

Despite the relative security of the Japanese workplace, more Japanese young people are postponing full-time employment, according to Pennsylvania State University professors Edwin Herr and Agnes Watanabe.

According to Herr, a professor of education, and Watanabe, a professor of psychology, high-school dropout rates are rising in Japan, along with unemployment and voluntary part-time employment among people ages 15 to 25.

In "Career Development Issues Among Japanese Work Groups," published in the *Journal of Career Development*, Herr and Watanabe note, "The Japanese [employment] system provides the maximum security and guaranteed reward [for workers], yet an increasing number of Japanese young people are rejecting it, at least for the moment."

Japan's high-school dropout rate, although still low compared with that of other nations, reached an all-time high of 2.2 percent of high-school enrollment in 1989. (In Japan, students must pass an exam to enter high school, so "these high-school dropouts had first chosen high school, and then decided against it," notes Herr.)

In 1991, 8 percent of the population ages 15 to 24 were unemployed. A more recent survey found that about 10 percent of new high-school graduates in Japan opt for part-time work.

Various studies indicate that many young Japanese have trouble selecting a career or occupation, do not have a clear sense of their own skills and abilities, and feel dissatisfied with the job opportunities they do have.

"Many Japanese young people,

both male and female, seem willing to accept part-time employment until they can find work that allows them some independence," says Herr. "They want more than automatic security from the workplace."

### Soundbite

*From a talk on "Women in the Workforce—A Business Imperative," given by Mary Kramer, associate publisher and editor of Crain's Detroit Business, to the Economic Club of Detroit, February 22, 1994.*

"For a man or a woman to succeed in a business, there is one rule that carries across the board: If you want the rewards, you've got to do the work..."

"But what women may have especially overlooked because it's subtle, is that while you have to do the work, you do not necessarily have to do all the work yourself.

"To be successful in a business, a woman must learn to assemble her own personal success team. You need a network of people—men and women—to make you larger than you are. That's not selfish. That's just smart....

"Your network is more than a safety net into which you can gently fall; it's guide wires and ropes with which you can lift yourself up. And who knows? You might be able to lift a few other people along the way. I think *that* is real power."

### Lightening a Moody Meeting

"Some people seem to arrive at meetings with little thunderclouds over their heads," notes "meeting master" Sharon Lippincott in *Meetings Dos, Don'ts and Donuts: The Complete Handbook for Successful Meetings*. (Lighthouse Point Press, 1994).

To avoid negative attitudes on the part of one or two participants that can sour a whole group, address the issue in the group's ground rules, Lippincott advises. Have the group spell out that negative behavior, sexist language, chronic lateness, or persistent interruptions are unacceptable.

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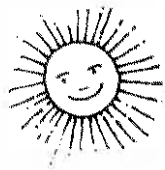
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and further education. Day in, day out, hundreds of thousands of people - from apprentices right through to the chairmen of boards of directors - sit on unsuitable chairs, in small, over-filled rooms with insufficient air-conditioning and lighting which is detrimental to the health, using teaching aids which are reminiscent of schools of the past. But learning's supposed to be fun and effective, for example in



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## In Practice

If negative attitudes surface anyway, talk about the problem. Schedule a discussion of negativity on the agenda, Lippincott says. Focus on what is wrong, not who is wrong. Avoid placing blame; leave personalities out of the discussion.

Sometimes a creative approach squelches negativity. Lippincott offers the following strategies for neutralizing naysayers in meetings:

**Have a ball.** Place a basket of soft foam balls in the center of the meeting table. Whenever a group member says something negative, fellow members pelt the offender with the balls. "This procedure injects humor into the meeting, relieves stress, and lightens the mood," says Lippincott.

**Try a little sugar.** Everyone starts the meeting with one chocolate-covered candy in front of him or her. One negative comment by each person is allowed to pass. After a second comment, the person must eat his or her chocolate candy and refrain from any more negative comments during the meeting. Lippincott says that with this technique, "behavior changes rapidly, because it quickly becomes a status symbol to have a piece of candy at your place when the meeting ends."

**Fun and games.** Let participants release stress during lengthy, task-oriented meetings. Keep toys and games on hand, such as bubble blowers, sponge balls, and children's modeling dough, and let participants play around for 10- or 15-minute breaks.

## Setting Fair, Family-Friendly Policies

Companies win kudos from workers with kids when they invest in family-friendly policies. But by trying to help employees balance the demands of work and family life, organizations might alienate workers who don't have children, reports the June 23 *Pensions & Benefits Daily* published by the Bureau of National Affairs.

"People should be equals in society and in the workplace—they should not be rewarded or punished based on their reproductive choices," California high-school teacher Leslie

Lafayette told BNA. Two years ago, Lafayette founded the ChildFree Network. She says the group, based in Citrus Heights, California, has members in more than 30 states and 2,500 subscribers to its newsletter.

Lafayette said that companies show favoritism toward workers with children in ways both subtle (such as letting extra work fall on childless employees) and overt (such as subsidizing child care without offering a comparable benefit to workers without children).

To achieve equity, some employers have revamped their benefits programs to address employees' personal needs more broadly, BNA reports. Here are a few examples cited in the article:

► Chicago-based Quaker Oats has reworked its benefits arrangement to help balance the amount of money workers with and without dependents have to spend on the firm's menu of benefits.

► Eastman Kodak in Rochester, New York, last year expanded eligibility for its one-year unpaid personal leave policy. Once reserved for employees with "compelling needs" or those returning to school, now the leave is widely available for almost any reason.

► In August 1993, Harris Bank in Chicago offered all of its 4,200 employees the options of part-time work, job sharing, flexible hours, compressed workweeks, and working from home.

► Xerox, headquartered in Stamford, Connecticut, last year launched its LifeCycle Assistance program, which offers each employee up to \$1,750 per year (up to a lifetime total of \$10,000, with the exact amount depending on salary), to subsidize child care. The company might expand the grants to cover mortgage points for first-time home buyers, elder care, and partial pay replacement for family-related leaves of absence.

**"In Practice"** is edited and written by **Erica Gordon Sorohan**. Send items of interest to "In Practice," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.