

Employers find right talent matters more than traditional work schedules

BY TRACY CARBASHO

American workers are proving they can get the job done without going into the office every day.

In fact, a survey conducted in September 2005 by The Dieringer Research Group Inc. in Milwaukee revealed U.S. employees are embracing the concepts of telecommuting, or working from home, and teleworking — the ability to work from virtually anywhere. Portable technology, high-speed communication devices and corporate cultures that support work-life balance are enabling employees to conduct business no matter where they go.

The trend is in line with the corporate culture of Pittsburgh companies such as Blattner Brunner, Deloitte & Touche USA LLP, Mellon Financial Corp. and Pascale Communications.

Blattner Brunner, which also has advertising offices in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., hired Natalie Perkins of Raleigh, N.C., as its chief marketing officer in October 2005.

"We like to hire the best talent and if the only way we can get that talent is via a telecommuting or teleworking setup, we're willing to negotiate," said Scott Morgan, president of Blattner Brunner. "There may be a need to have more of these se-

tups in order to attract talent in the Atlanta and D.C. markets where it can take two hours to drive 15 miles."

Being able to keep the cash she would be paying for gasoline to travel to the office every day is just one of the amenities enjoyed by Perkins, who typically works from home two days a week and commutes to either the Atlanta or Washington office on the remaining three days.

"I get more work done when I'm at home because there are less interruptions," she said. "I spend a lot of time at home doing conference calls and videoconferencing."

Morgan said providing teleworkers with the necessary technology to access the company network and to enable them to communicate effectively with colleagues and clients is essential. Blattner Brunner provided Perkins with videoconferencing capabilities and a BlackBerry.

Georgette Pascale, a Shadyside resident who previously spent 12 years working for public relations firms in New York City, said instant messaging and other types of technology are especially critical when employees work in remote locations. She started the midsize public relations firm in 2005 and now has five employees in the Pittsburgh region, all of whom work from home.

"Working from home isn't for everyone. You have to be disciplined and be comfort-



Georgette Pascale, president of Pascale Communications, a midsize public relations firm, works out of her Shadyside home office. "This doesn't work for people who crave the interaction of being in an office," she says.

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able working in your own environment," said Pascale. "This doesn't work for people who crave the interaction of being in an office."

Erin Caffrey, a senior account executive for Pascale Communications who lives in Clarion, Pa., said working at home has increased her productivity by at least two hours every day.

"Those are words that resonate with any business owner," she said.

Caffrey saves time by not having to prepare and drive to work every morning and by not becoming involved in idle office chat.

Eric Johnson, senior manager of Deloitte Services LP, a subsidiary of Deloitte & Touche, said the telework option gives employees the flexibility to work in the manner that is most effective for them. In addition to providing the necessary technology, Deloitte also offers training to educate employees about communicating ef-

fectively and managing virtual teams.

"From the standpoint of employers, it extends the labor pool because they can get the most talented employees based on the skills they have and not simply where they are located," said Johnson.

Tim Kane, national leader of the Virtual Workplace Solutions Group for Deloitte Consulting LLP, said telework is becoming popular at all sizes and types of companies, especially ones that have customer call centers.

"The challenge for companies is bringing together the technology, human resources and real estate groups to provide an integrated approach," said Kane. "Companies that have done it well have reduced their real estate requirements by 10 to 20 percent."

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