

## **Which jobs are appropriate for telecommuting?**

### **What are the characteristics of a good telecommuter?**

Good employees make good telecommuters. Someone whose performance is mediocre in the office isn't likely to do well away from the office. Look for people with demonstrated ability to manage their own time and workload well, solve many of their own problems, and find satisfaction in completing tasks on their own with minimal direct supervision.

### **How do you decide what jobs are best for telecommuting?**

It depends on a combination of the nature of the tasks involved and the technology. Jobs that are information-based jobs with a minimum amount of unpredictable face-to-face contact required are good prospects. Also, look for jobs that are physically portable - that is, whatever the telecommuter needs to do the job can be taken home in a briefcase or box, or can be accessed via phone line.

Keep in mind that since most telecommuters work out of the office one to three days a week on average, the entire job need not be suited to telecommuting. That is, if there is only one to three days worth of work per week in the job that is suited to telecommuting, that's good enough. It's rare, in fact, that information-based jobs (especially at the professional/technical level) are fully suited to telecommuting, i.e., can be done away from the office five days a week.

### **Should an employee be in his/her job for any minimum time before starting to telecommute?**

In general, it makes sense to have some minimum time with the organization and in the current position. The time with the organization is useful so people can learn what goes on, who does what, and what the organization's culture is. The time in the current job is important because that's the basis of being able to work more independently while away from the office. Someone who is brand-new in a job is more likely to need frequent contact with the manager or co-workers - and could be frustrated by being away from the office too much.

### **How does the employer deal with the fact that some people can telecommute and others just can't?**

First, make it clear that telecommuting is nothing more than a different job assignment, and not a perk or benefit. The key is to prevent the perception that employees are entitled to telecommute. Also, many employers have found that offering a range of flexible work options is an effective way to avoid these problems. Those who can't telecommute might

be able to job-share or work in some other kind of alternative schedule or staffing arrangement.