



OREGON OFFICE OF ENERGY

# TELEWORK

## Employees' Quality of Life Brings Telework Into Focus



*Director of Accounting Cathy Gerald (center) supervises five part-time teleworkers at In Focus Systems. She kick-started telework at the company with a test program in her department.*

**W**hen managers at In Focus Systems, Inc. sought to improve quality of life of their 500 employees — many of whom work long hours — they harnessed the company's creative spirit.

Teams went into brainstorming mode. Director of Accounting Cathy Gerald and her team hit upon telework.

First, Gerald gathered information on equipment requirements and teleworker and management practices. Then she developed with team members and Human Resources, Information Technology and Facilities staff a preliminary telework program for her department. In fall 1995, five employees began working at home part-time, including Gerald herself.

"We want to foster innovative and creative ways to do things," said Vice President of Human Resources Sue Thompson. "We trust our employees and that they know what they need to do. Expecting everybody to work 8 to 5 just didn't seem right. We wanted to provide flexibility for them. That was the beginning of it all."

The company now has about 20 teleworkers, including six in Financial Accounting. Other participants include a technical writer and staff in Information Technology and Human Resources. Most work at home one or two days a week.

### **IN FOCUS SYSTEMS, INC. WILSONVILLE, ORE.**

In Focus Systems, Inc. develops, manufactures and sells multimedia projection products and services that make it easy to share information in business and sales presentations, software demonstrations, education and training, and interactive work group meetings.



*Senior Accountant Lori Eikren works at home one or two days a week on the company's accounting system. She appreciates the change in work environment and the extra time she gets with her family.*

Both men and women at the company value the flexibility telework gives them to balance work and family life. Reducing time spent commuting also is an important benefit.

Telework is an option for employees on a case-by-case basis, depending on whether the work can be done from home without negatively impacting the business or customers, said Thompson.

The company provides computers, software, telephone lines and access to its network of computers. A 35-percent state tax credit from the Oregon Office of Energy reduced the costs of computer equipment for teleworkers.

## ACCOUNTING

Some companies test the idea of telework with managers, so they'll be better able to manage teleworkers later on. Gerald had seen for herself the productivity and lifestyle benefits of telework before the trial program. She had for several years worked at home about a day a month.

"People need to make the transition from managing by seeing people to managing by results," said Gerald. "At In Focus, we are very results-oriented. We're trying to break the old mental model that you need to work on site from 8 to 5. I've seen when my employees have more flexibility, they're willing to go the extra mile. In some cases, productivity improved because employees had more focused time with fewer distractions."

## Change in Work Environment Is Refreshing

Senior Accountant Lori Eikren volunteered for Gerald's telework trial because she wanted to be able to vary her schedule, work in different environments, and get away from the office to concentrate on projects.

"For me, it is just a total reenergize," said Eikren.

She works at home one day a week (two days a week in summer), avoiding more than an hour round-trip commute between Wilsonville and her north Portland home, and saves 30 miles worth of gasoline.

She does just about the same tasks at home as at the office: reconciling cash accounts and performing account maintenance. She says she feels more productive and better organized as a result of her teleworking, and her absenteeism is reduced. She especially appreciates the flexibility.

"I have two small children, so it's nice to have a system set up at home so I can work at home whenever I want to, whether or not it's my telecommuting day," said Eikren.

## New Mother Gives Up Full-Time Office, Not the Job

Accounting Specialist Laurie Moulton tracks revenue at the company, with tasks related primarily to computing and reporting. She was pregnant at the time the Accounting Department was starting its telework program, and curious about telework.

"I thought that this was the best time to do it," said Moulton. "I wasn't really sure what was going to happen after I had the baby, so I thought I would bring up the idea to Cathy Gerald, and she helped me get started."

Moulton, who works a compressed work week, was able to take care of her newborn while she worked at home three days a week. She required daycare only on Tuesdays, when she worked in the office.

"They knew it wouldn't work for everyone, but they thought it would work for me," said Moulton. "With my newborn, I got a lot of interruptions. But I got the same amount of interruptions at work, so I got the same amount of work done. And if I didn't get something done during the day, I could finish it at night."

After a year of teleworking, Moulton recently returned to the office full-time. She works at home in the



Accounting Specialist Laurie Moulton worked at home three days a week last year. She's back at the office full-time, but plans to resume teleworking one day a week.

evenings if needed, instead of staying late at the office. "And when I'm sick I just stay home and work instead of getting everyone at the office sick," added Moulton.

She plans to resume teleworking one day a week.

Supervisor Cathy Gerald says the telework program helps her retain top-notch employees, including Eikren and Moulton. "When they are able to telecommute, they get that little bit of personal time," said Gerald. "That's what's important to them."

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Scott Myers manages business applications for several In Focus departments. Three of the six applications developers he supervises work at home part-time.

"It benefits the company because they can be more focused and I get more results from them," said Myers.

He says he knows productivity has gone up because there's a tracking system for all work requests. They're logged in a database, along with estimates of how long the projects will take and how many hours they actually required.

"The way we review people is based on what we've accomplished and which of our goals we've met for the year," Myers said. Managing by results is key for telework arrangements.

The first step toward getting results, says Myers, is attracting excellent employees. "You can get better qualified people when you have a flexible structure

that allows them to work from home." And you can keep them, too, he says.

## New Database Manager Changes Mind About Moving, Not About Job

When Garth Mortensen accepted the job of database administrator two years ago, he began planning his move from Philomath to the Wilsonville area. He arranged to work at home one day a week until he moved to reduce his weekly commute. The daily round-trip was 150 miles — a three-hour ordeal.

But as time went on, it became clear that his family didn't want to move. Mortensen sold his supervisor on increasing telework to three days a week, making it possible for him to stay with the company.

Mortensen says the agreement is mutually beneficial. "In Focus gets a lot more support and coverage after-hours and on weekends than they would normally get because I'm set up and watching things remotely," he said.

"My number-one job is to keep our corporate data accessible. Preventive maintenance needs to be done while the systems are not being used. I can do all of it from home, in the middle of the night if I have to, and not have to drive into work early the next morning."

The arrangement works. According to Mortensen, databases were available 99.25 percent of the time last year. That's far less downtime than the company's ever had.

That may explain why supervisor Scott Myers says his experience with the telework arrangement has been "excellent."

Mortensen regularly attends three meetings a week at the office. He also spends time there getting feedback from his customers.

### TELEWORK DEFINED

Telework (also called *telecommuting*) is working at home or at an office near home one or more days a week, instead of commuting to the main office or place of business. Because telework reduces the work commute, it can conserve fuel, relieve traffic congestion and improve air quality.

But e-mail is the primary means of communication whether he's working at the office or at home. "We can be eight cubicles away and still have a dialogue on e-mail," said Mortensen.

An employee under his supervision handles emergencies when Mortensen is working at home. "It's been good for him," said Mortensen. "He gets extra experience that he might not get if I were in the office all the time. He takes the first pass at it, and when he's stumped, I'll get involved."

That frees up Mortensen to work at home on analysis, long-term planning, programming and problem-solving. "With fewer interruptions and a greater ability to concentrate, I get work done a lot quicker and more accurately," he said.

The company recently installed an ISDN line at his home, dramatically improving the speed of his office connection. "Now there's very little difference between being at the office and being at home," he said.

## No Commute = More Work Done + More Family Time

The other two teleworkers Myers supervises have more contact with end-users. So they work at home less — just one or two days a week — and work at home on different days to maintain coverage in the

### BENEFITS OF TELEWORK FOR OREGON BUSINESSES

- Boosts productivity for many employees
- Frees up expensive office space
- Reduces parking requirements and traffic at the facility
- Improves recruitment and retention
- Allows employees to better balance work and family life
- Reduces employees' stress
- Allows employees with disabilities to work at home
- Helps meet commute-trip reduction mandates

office. Myers says he actually *enjoys* covering for Senior Programmer Analyst Marlin Mutschler on his telework days.

But Myers isn't overwhelmed as a backup because Mutschler is connected to the office computer system the entire time he's working at home — receiving and sending e-mail at the same speed as in the office — and he checks voice mail every hour or two.

"I'm sort of still at the office because I can respond as fast," said Mutschler.

Meanwhile, the company is reaping the benefits of his quiet home office.

"In our line of work, we do a lot of troubleshooting," said Myers. "You're constantly getting calls and getting interrupted. He can get as much done in two to three hours telecommuting as he can get done in the office in eight hours."

Mutschler lives in Vancouver, Wash., and avoids an 84-mile round-trip commute every Friday, and an additional day every other week.

"I don't know if I'd be working here otherwise," said Mutschler. "It's very expensive for me to drive and time-consuming, because traffic is getting to be horrendous in Portland."

On his telework days he gets two extra hours to spend with his family and can see his children off to school. At the same time, telework allows him to put in more time on the job.

"Since I have the technology at home," said Mutschler, "I can do more work. So they're getting more hours from me."

## Son Rides the Bus, Mom Saves a Hundred Miles

Debi White does applications programming for the Manufacturing Department and makes sure that the applications they use are working properly and helping them do their job.

About a year ago, she began working at home one day a week because her 6-year-old son wanted to ride the bus one day a week to school. (White leaves her home in Battleground, Wash., before 7 a.m. other days of the week, dropping off her son at child care on the way.)

"It works great because my son gets to do what he wants," said White, "and I don't feel as stressed that

day because I don't get interrupted. I can keep on one train of thought and get work done quicker and better."

She also saves nearly a hundred miles and two hours of commuting time.

Being set up to work at home gives her more flexibility. She can work at home after-hours to make up for taking her son to the doctor or spending time at his school. White recently worked at home during her son's spring break so she could make the daily drop-offs and pick-ups for his soccer camp.

Because her coworkers support different departments, White says they "probably couldn't care less" about her working at home. "We work a lot together, ask each other questions. But by and large they don't know that I'm not at the office on Thursdays."

Jeff Maurer, White's supervisor, says working at home one day a week is a good fit for his staff. The other four analysts and programmers in his group work at home occasionally on an *ad hoc* basis.

"There's a lot of face-to-face analysis," said Maurer. "It's difficult to substitute that in some cases with discussions by e-mail. If they were looking to telecommute 50 percent of the time, that would be difficult."

Maurer says scheduling meetings for the group hasn't been an issue because of White's predictable telework schedule. And he says her telework is not just good for her — it's good for the company.

"It gives her better flow time to work on documents and projects," said Maurer. "Everybody needs that time, and you can't always get it in the office. At the end of the day, I see all the e-mails and I know from the progress she's making that it's productive time for her."

Telework is a "factor in happiness long-term" at In Focus, says Maurer. "It's just refreshing for people to have a different environment and not have the commute one day a week or more."

## MARKETING, STRATEGY AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Whether it's leading the company's marketing strategy, writing product guides or keeping the office running smoothly, flexible arrangements are working for In Focus' Marketing and Product Development Department.



Vice President of Human Resources Sue Thompson (standing) views telework as an extension of providing flexibility for employees.

## Home Is Main Office While Director Works on Ph.D.

Dr. Candace Petersen was recruited by In Focus in 1993 to manage market research, forecasting and strategy while she was working on a doctorate at Portland State. For three-and-a-half years, she did most of her analytical work at her home office — at all hours.

"I ran the forecasting models, did market research, made phone calls, prepared strategies, worked with outside analysts, and prepared for board presentations on our projects," said Peterson.

She went into the office for meetings — to present forecasts and board presentations, for example — anywhere from once a week to everyday.

"I'm paid for what I do, not when I'm sitting in my chair," said Peterson. "I was empowered by In Focus management to decide where and how I would get the project done.

"I do my best work at night — reading, thinking, sending the more thoughtful e-mails, coming up with solutions — and I do it best at home."

Last summer, a month after she received her doctorate, Peterson agreed to serve as acting vice president of Marketing and Product Development, and began working in the office full-time to supervise the 25 people under her direction.

## Writer Can Focus on Work, Knowing Her Daughter Is Safe

About that time, Technical Publications Manager Ellen Meeker was considering cutting back to 32 hours a week so she could avoid having her 7-year-old daughter in after-school care. Peterson suggested instead that Meeker work at home at the end of each workday. Now Meeker leaves work at 3, picks up her daughter, and works at home while her daughter plays or watches educational programs on public television.

"I feel more secure because I know where she is," said Meeker. "She's with 'Bill Nye the Science Guy.'"

"Everybody has a couple of hours of work, that if managed properly, they could do at home," said Peterson. "If anything, I have Ellen's attention from 3 to 5. If she were going to worry about her daughter, I'd lose her anyway. We have a win-win situation."

Meeker works full days at home about twice a month. And when she's sick, she puts in some hours at home instead of missing work altogether.

"I was sick in January for a week and a half," said Meeker. "I put in at least half-time at home. If I wasn't telecommuting, I wouldn't have been able to do that because I was too sick to go into the office."

Along with another employee she supervises, Meeker writes user's guides for In Focus products and notes for accessories. She also prepares the documents for CDs. That's one of many things she does while working at home. Other work she saves for home includes formatting French, German and Spanish translations of the documents and writing Windows on-line help files.

Meeker is on line while she works at home, so she's in constant communication with staff by e-mail. But she says her job doesn't require her to interact frequently with her manager. "We have a very clear idea of what our job is, and we don't need a lot of direction."

## A Variety of Flexible Work Arrangements

Meeker is just one of Peterson's employees with flexible work arrangements.

The department secretary, for example, resolved her child care concerns by beginning her workday an hour earlier so she can go home at 4. Another employee, a former field sales representative used to a flexible work schedule, works at home on an occasional basis.

"Trust is key," according to Peterson. "If people are going to abuse telecommuting, they'll abuse coffee breaks, they'll abuse lunch hours, they'll abuse travel expense forms. If you trust them on the other things, why not telecommuting?"

## HUMAN RESOURCES

The company's telework program helps recruit quality employees — and helps the recruiters do their work.

## No Knocks on Recruiters' Doors When They're Telephoning

Senior Recruiter Mary Beth Driver works at home on Thursdays, setting interview schedules, conducting phone interviews, checking references and scheduling debrief meetings.

"What I like most about it is how productive I can feel at the end of the day," said Driver. "I can look at my Day-Timer® and see that I got all my messages returned and feel fresh on Friday."

She keeps her telework day consistent so it's easy for staff to keep track of her. She participates by teleconference if any meetings are scheduled that day in the office.

Driver tries to schedule phone interviews on Thursdays to avoid the interruptions she'd have at the office.

## TELEWORK SERVICES FOR OREGON EMPLOYERS

The Oregon Office of Energy helps Oregon employers make telework a successful work option. We offer a 35 percent state tax credit and loans for telework equipment. We also help organizations determine how telework can work for them and serve as an ongoing resource as they advance their telework program. We train supervisors and employees on site. We research successful Oregon telework programs. And we track down information employers need to develop a telework program that works for them.

To learn more about telework, call the Oregon Office of Energy toll-free: 1-800-221-8035. Or visit our Web site: [www.cbs.state.or.us/external/ooe](http://www.cbs.state.or.us/external/ooe).

“Quality of the work goes up because I’m so focused,” said Driver. “It’s quiet in my home, and I can concentrate and answer all the questions. After I hang up the phone at the office, someone will step in my door before I’ve finished work from my last call.”

“When recruiters have people tapping on their door continuously, it’s harder to do phone screening, sourcing and reference-checking,” said supervisor Nancy Bates, Human Resources staffing manager.

When recruiters are checking references, for example, they must listen carefully, take notes and return later to important points for further exploration. People are taking their time to give you a reference, says Bates, and when someone is knocking at your door, you lose your train of thought.

The other senior recruiter at In Focus, a new mother, works at home on Wednesdays. “Even though she takes her young son to daycare, it gives them a chance to spend a little more time together,” said Bates.

“It’s more productive for recruiters to have uninterrupted time. And it gives them more balance in their lives.”

This publication will be made available in accessible formats upon request.

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