

# Weighing the Pros and Cons of Working from Home

By BNET Editorial

published on BNET.com 11/13/2007

Many people believe that working from home (sometimes known as “telecommuting” or “teleworking”) is the ideal employment option. And for many it is. It frees them from having to battle commuter traffic and crowds, allows them to get their work done without the interruptions of a busy office, and leaves them with plenty of time to pursue their outside interests.

But for others, making the transition from an office to a home environment proves difficult. For convenience, cost, and comfort, nothing can beat a home office. But on the downside, you are literally on your own—and if you don’t discipline yourself, you may spend more time surfing the Internet, or playing with your children or pets than actually doing your job. Conversely, you may find yourself neglecting your personal life in favor of your work. It can sometimes take a while to settle into a balanced routine.

There is clearly a lot to consider before making this transition, but if you are thinking about it, start by asking yourself the following questions:

- Am I a workaholic and if so, would working at home worsen that problem?
- Would I feel isolated if I’m at home more than usual?
- Could I separate my business from my personal life if both were under the same roof?

## What You Need to Know

---

### **I know I have workaholic tendencies, and am worried that things may get worse if I decide to work from home. How can I address this issue?**

Being aware of this part of your personality is a big part of the battle, but thinking carefully about your work-life balance before you decide to work from home will also help you make the right decision. Obviously you need to be productive—it is what you get paid for—but you also need to know where to draw the line. You cannot be checking your e-mail at all hours of the day and night “just in case.” An essential first step is to be aware of your own limitations and of the need to balance the demands of work with those of the other areas of your life.

## What to Do

---

### **Be Realistic About Potential Feelings of Isolation**

Some people are more comfortable with their own company than others and find it easier to work at home. Thinking about your personality traits will help you determine whether you are someone who can adapt easily to working from home.

People who are natural extroverts thrive on the company of others. They are motivated by the attention they receive and will look—consciously or unconsciously—to others and others' reactions for direction. They are naturally warm, affectionate, and trusting, and believe that others are basically good. Extroverts may be able to work effectively from home but are likely to suffer feelings of isolation. They need to have a strategy that enables them to continue to have contact with the outside world.

On the other hand, people who are introverted find social interaction draining and need time alone to recharge their batteries. They are also cooler and more detached in group situations. They may feel suspicious of others' motives and are disinclined to believe or trust them without good reason. Introverts are more internally motivated and have an inner sense of mission. They are naturally more likely to maintain their balance and motivation in an isolated environment. But they too can benefit from broadening their network to get input and support from others and to avoid becoming too much of a "hermit."

### **Be Honest About Your Reasons for Wanting to Work at Home**

We mentioned earlier that people have all sorts of reasons for choosing to work at home. You may have growing family commitments or have decided to study part-time. These are among the positive reasons for wanting to spend less time in the office, yet still have a productive work life.

There are, however, some negative reasons that may make us want an escape from the office, such as:

- stress or pressure
- difficult office politics
- a poor relationship with a coworker or supervisor
- bullying or harassment
- an office romance gone wrong
- feeling overworked

Many people have faced one or more of these problems during their working careers. Instead of running from the issue, try to make an effort to resolve it. If you still want to work at home afterward,

go ahead, but be sure you have thought carefully about your motivations. You will feel a lot better, however, if you can work things out.

If you *are* unhappy at work, remember that:

- you have every right to be treated respectfully in the workplace;
- if you are being bullied or harassed in any way, you should report it immediately. Tell your manager about it, or if he or she is the problem, tell a trusted friend, someone who works in human resources, or your union representative;.
- stress can affect your health, your work life, and your home life. It is essential that you let someone know about it who can take steps to help you. If your workload is too great, delegate what you can to a colleague or junior member of the staff; delegation is a sign of sensible time management, not an admission of failure;.
- putting yourself under too much pressure to be perfect is wrong. People make mistakes, and rather than beating yourself up if things occasionally go awry, learn from your mistakes. Talk to your manager if you have a problem; take steps to address it if you can; and then move on.

## Discuss It with Those Closest to You

If you have a partner, family, or housemates, your spending more time at home will affect their lives too. In most cases the effect will be positive, but you still may have family commitments that require you to work with others, for example, to make sure babies, young children, or sick relatives are cared for.

It would be unfair to others for you to just make a unilateral decision. You need to make sure that your plans do not conflict with other people's to such an extent that they make your ideas unworkable. This is not to say that you should abandon the idea—many couples work very successfully from home together—but just make sure that your dream scenario will work in reality.

## Discuss It With Your Boss

Flexible working arrangements are an important employment issue, and many people agree that they can contribute positively to a good work-life balance.

However, *requesting* a flexible working arrangement, does not automatically guarantee that you will get it. You need to present a good case, stressing its benefit to the business.

As a first step, drop your manager a brief e-mail about what you have in mind. You should not just show up in his or her office with a surprise request. Unless you have had previous conversations on the subject, he or she probably has no idea that you have been thinking about it.

Explain to your manager what you see as the potential benefits of your working from home and know in advance how you will answer these questions:

- How will you still contribute effectively to your team?
- How would a change in your working arrangement affect your colleagues?
- Will there be any overall effect on the work you do?
- How could a change in your working arrangement affect the business *positively*?

If your boss approves your plans, tell any colleagues and contacts who might need to know, and then start thinking about what it will take to set up a home office.

## Be Ready to Readjust

Setting up a home office is one of the many things you will have to think about when planning your new working arrangement. Organizing and reorganizing your files, hanging and rehanging your posters, arranging and rearranging your computer system, so that everything is exactly where you want it can be a lot of fun. But at some point, you will have to buckle down to work, and at first you may not find it so easy.

Do not expect to settle down immediately—though it would be great if you can. You will likely need some time to adjust. Try making—and sticking to—simple to-do lists of useful tasks that will help see you through the early days.

## What to Avoid

---

### You Underestimate How Much You Value Company

If you are naturally gregarious, you may find it difficult to be away from the noise and activity of an office. You would eventually become accustomed to your new working environment, but think carefully about whether it is really the right move for you.

### You See Working from Home as an “Escape”

If you are having a problem at work, the idea of retreating to the comfort of your home can be very tempting. However, if the problem is serious, one that you will still have on days that you go into the office, you need to face it. Remember that *no-one*, however high a position the person has in the

company, has a right to treat you unfairly or with disrespect. If you are being bullied or harassed, follow the advice above and act quickly to stop it.

## **You Think *Everyone* Will Be As Positive About It As You Are**

Working from home may be your idea of bliss, but those affected by your decision may not see it the same way. Be sure you have worked it out with your partner and/or your family, and that they are happy with your decision before you talk to your boss about your plans. Take care to stress to your boss how the change in your working routine will make a positive contribution to the business.

## **Where to Learn More**

---

### **Web Sites:**

QuintCareers.com: [www.quintcareers.com/telecommute\\_jobs.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/telecommute_jobs.html)

Work Options: [www.workoptions.com/index.htm](http://www.workoptions.com/index.htm)

IHA: [www.homeworkers.org](http://www.homeworkers.org)

Solutions for growing businesses: [www.entrepreneur.com](http://www.entrepreneur.com)