Telework as a Team Sport:
GSA's 10 Tips

Teleworking is an exciting initiative intended to align with GSA's core strategic values of sustainability and workforce excellence. If not handled properly, however, teleworking can foster a sense of isolation and anxiety among work team members, breaking down the bond created by everyday personal interaction within a traditional office environment. It is therefore essential that teleworking be viewed as a team, rather than a personal, endeavor, where individual and team successes will result from continued team engagement and tackling of all work issues. Use the following ten tips to enhance communication, customer service, and performance while working in or out of the office.

1. Collectively address questions within your team about teleworking

To help reduce anxieties and foster full confidence in the culture shift to teleworking, supervisors and employees are encouraged to engage in dialogue by discussing the following questions.

- How do we connect with each other?
- How will technology help us telework?
- How will my supervisor evaluate me if he/she rarely sees me?
- How will we accomplish inter-group coordination?
- How do we create a sense of "workplace" when we are working away from the office?
- How do we create a sense of community and connectivity if we are working away from the office?
- How do we make friends or "Have a best friend at work"?
- How do we create visibility and opportunity for people?
- How will teleworking affect my career path?
- How do we manage customer expectations and stay connected to them?

Inviting team members to discuss and achieve a consensus on solutions to questions about teleworking will help build community and an investment in making teleworking "work."

2. View Telework as a team instead of an individual work schedule

The tendency for supervisors may very well be to view teleworking as an individual request. However, if teams develop a telework business approach and system that is right for everyone, it will improve inter and intra group connectivity, performance, and community. Rather than establishing an independent schedule, determine a team schedule. Telework when appropriate for you and your team. Flexibility is key. Remember the needs of the business may make it difficult to follow a proposed mobile arrangement.

3. Use available technologies to build teams/communities

Some good examples of systematic ways to use technologies to help people stay connected are:

- Team members log on to the instant messaging (IM) system each morning and say "hello" to fellow team members. If they are leaving their computer, they note this on their IM status. This note establishes a virtual presence for teammates.

- Team members use social media tools to stay connected.
- One team member is a self-appointed "water cooler chat generator." Using a blog, this team member posts periodic questions and comments to keep the team connected and engaged. You can also create chat generators using IM statuses.

4. Develop telework agreements specific to your work group or team that outline expectations and protocols

- Different types of work and different work styles require different teleworking arrangements that specify, for example, when team members are expected to attend on-site meetings, how they use instant messaging, etc.
- Work collaboratively to develop arrangements that will result in the best team performance and community.
- Define service level support requirements for communicating with customers. All team members need to agree to meet the same service levels to ensure transparency to the customer.
- Remember teams are unlikely to get these arrangements right the first time. Evolving work groups and projects may also force changes in the original arrangements, regardless of how successful they may have been. Remain flexible, pulse-check frequently to evaluate, and adjust the arrangements periodically, or as needed.

5. Work with your IT group to ensure technology is effective, efficient, operates consistently, and provides excellent customer service

- A key reason for teleworking dissatisfaction is IT failure. Teleworkers are dependent on fast, reliable, consistent connections.
- Once your team begins to embrace teleworking, involve the IT department in your planning and implementation.
- IT department involvement and support is critical to your success, job satisfaction and performance.

6. Monitor teleworking performance for the team

Establish a dashboard for meaningful performance measures that will give you a weekly snapshot of team performance. These should be a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures. One measure might be the reduction in team sickness and absenteeism. Customer satisfaction might be another.

7. Establish community events

Collectively decide what types of events and activities will build a sense of cohesion and community. Possibly include a regular social event. The value of in-person community office time increases when working in a mobile environment.

8. Provide regular performance feedback to team members

It is easier to formally measure productivity and performance in some roles than others. Team members in analytical positions are harder to assess than those in production positions. Work collectively as a team to determine realistic and appropriate individual performance measures. Remember that informal recognition from peers is another way of giving and receiving feedback. And, informal recognition goes a long way to help team members feel involved and appreciated.

9. Appoint one team member to coordinate hoteling and non-traditional work systems

Sharing of office space while teleworking enables a decrease in an agencies physical real property footprint. To maximize space utilization, teleworkers are encouraged to share their space while teleworking or relinquish their in-office space and hotel when working in the office. The hoteling coordinator's role includes working with supervisors and employees to collect and disseminate best practices, developing teleworking/hoteling skills and protocols, and building the culture of teleworking/hoteling. Consider procuring a hoteling software to manage space.

10. Maintain the enthusiasm, commitment and engagement of the team members

It is crucial to maintain the enthusiasm, commitment and engagement of all team members. It is every team member's responsibility to monitor and evaluate the team's progress and maintain successful teleworking programs.