

Think Outside the Office

BY ROBYN BEWS

Why do the majority of Calgarians still strive to get downtown for 8 a.m. in rush hour, only to return home in the evening, fighting the congestion with thousands of others? And isn't it true that a great majority of Calgarians are "knowledge workers," sitting at their desks for much of the day? It's time to think outside the office.

Telework is the practice of working where and when you are most effective. This may include working from home, a distributed work centre, a client site, or anywhere else an employee can effectively complete their work. It offers proven bottom-line savings for businesses, improves employee retention and attraction, and is a tangible, measurable way to reduce green house gas emissions.

The Calgary region is ideally suited for increased adoption of telework as a result of its growth and the challenges associated with skilled labour shortages, the environmental image associated with the energy sector, and public transportation and infrastructure stresses. Additionally, and most importantly, Calgary possesses a significant number of knowledge workers who are ideally suited to telework.

Telework is not a new concept. In fact, for over two decades futurists, analysts and employees alike have been predicting that flexible work arrangements are going to see an "inevitable and steep incline." Programs that benefit both business and people have been embraced by Calgary businesses before. For example, consider the flex day. Flex days, which allow employees a paid personal day several times a year in addition to traditional vacation days, are a tool for both attracting talent and also getting the most productive work out of employees. Flex days are now common practice in the Calgary business community.

"Many mature workers are looking for more flexibility and balance in their work life, and flex programs help meet that need," says Ron Prokosch, CMC, CHRP, managing partner, Legacy Human Capital Group. "Gen Xers value time with their families and extracurricular activities.... The purpose is essentially to attract and retain employees and to enable employees to be more productive." The same results can be realized for properly planned and implemented telework arrangements.

So why then have we not seen the practice move from its relatively 'underground' position to more mainstream?

Data suggests that the actual number of teleworkers is in fact on the rise. However, further investigation illustrates that your average Calgary business has not adopted the practice in any formalized way. This suggests that many telework arrangements are the result of a side deal between

managers and employees on an ad-hoc basis.

So, how does telework, which offers bottom-line benefits to the employer, employee and environment, begin to establish itself as a common business tool?

WORKshift, an innovative initiative led by Calgary Economic Development, will give businesses the necessary tools, resources and support to successfully implement their own measurable telework program.

The WORKshift "toolbox" includes:

- A web-based tool that will measure and track cost savings, and positive impacts to the environment
- Quick start and booster kits
- Employee/employer telework agreements
- FAQs and best practices
- Training for teleworkers, telework managers and corporate services
- Membership to a knowledge network for learning and sharing

A popular myth surrounding telework is that if you can't see your employees, they are not working. And yet, employers report a significant increase in employee productivity, 15 to 40 per cent compared to their office counterparts, when working outside the office.

The issue remains that it is not until organizations and leaders begin to manage by results that telework will be fully embraced. WORKshift can position Calgary and the region as a global leader in flexible and alternative work arrangements. By supporting business, people and the environment, telework will positively affect the way Calgarians live and work, adding to the list of our city's enviable qualities.

How can WORKshift work for you?

www.workshiftcalgary.com



WORKshift
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