



# Telework success depends on clear expectations

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Telework programs were lauded as one of the only things that went right during the Washington metro area's blizzards this winter. While most private businesses and government agencies shut down, those with telework programs were able to continue being productive.

Patent and Trade Office senior telework advisor Danette Campbell says her agency actually increased its average efficiency during the storm. This is in the face of some [estimates that say](#) the federal government as a whole lost \$100 million each day because of the snow shut down.

This was one of the many points talked about during a breakout session at the [Senior Executive Associations \(SEA\) Executive Update conference](#) in Washington earlier this week.

The session offered Senior Executive Service members a chance to discuss the pros and cons of teleworking as well as ask questions about the trends toward telework, alternative work schedules and other programs that seek to address the worklife balance of the federal workforce.

Bill Bransford, general counsel of SEA, says that telework has potential but isn't a cure-all because it is so difficult to manage.

"Telework programs engender a sense of entitlement, of having a day off," says Bransford, who is a regular contributor to Federal News Radio. "Programs must be implemented carefully, slowly and with clear expectations if they are going to be successful."

An audience member brought up a situation in which his office called one employee who was teleworking. The phone was answered by a child who said "Dad can't talk. He took my brother to soccer."

While the story elicited a mixture of laughter and groans, Bransford says it illustrates his point about entitlement perfectly.

"Managers must receive thorough training. They must lay down clear rules and be willing to enforce those rules," he says.

Campbell said that PTO's telework program is so successful because the agency has very clearly defined expectations of what must be accomplished on a bi-weekly basis. While her agency initially encountered challenges from managers and customers, Campbell says by starting small and collecting and analyzing data on effective practices the program has flourished.

Currently, 71 percent of PTO positions are eligible for telework, and of those eligible, 83 percent actually work outside

the office. PTO says telework benefits include improving employee retention, maximizing office space and reducing auto emissions by 5,000 tons in 2007.

Transportation is Willie Smith's point of reference regarding telework. As the director of the Office of Acquisition Management at the Department of Transportation (DOT), he first [viewed telework](#) as a way to reduce rush hour congestion. However, he found that given the opportunity, most of his agencies employees did not want to telework, primarily because their homes are not equipped with the same resources as an office.

Several members of the audience agreed with the concern of the loss of office resources and camaraderie. Smith says that there are options for physical resources, such as the [14 telework centers](#) in the Washington area. He also says there has been a proliferation of professional networking opportunities, such as chat rooms and combination social and professional meetings in local communities.

Smith says recognizing the changes in information, technology and the next generation of workers is crucial to continued success in the workplace.

"The world has changed, and we have to be willing to change with it if we want to continue to grow," he says. "That will probably mean that many employees won't be tied to desks in brick and mortar offices."

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