To Telecommute or not to Telecommute? That Is the Question.

Technological advancements have made working remotely, or telecommuting, a viable alternative to the traditional 9 to 5 office model. Laptops, smartphones, teleconferencing and Skype have all increased the ease with which employees can connect to their workplaces. Canadian businesses are becoming increasingly flexible and many are moving toward offering telecommuting. According to a 2011 report by the Telework Research Network, 3 in every 100 Canadians work from home, and it appears that the number of telecommuters in Canada is increasing.[1]

Despite this trend, telecommuting has recently come under fire. What has emerged from the debate are two distinct schools of thought when it comes to the relative pros and cons of allowing employees to work remotely.

The first school of thought is that telecommuting leads to decreased productivity. Telecommuting's most high-profile detractor of late is Marissa Mayer, the CEO of Internet giant Yahoo. Mayer recently banned telecommuting at Yahoo in an effort to improve productivity, noting that "speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home." In announcing its ban on telecommuting, Yahoo emphasized that physical presence at the office and working in a team environment on a daily basis are crucial to the success of any business.

The second school of thought regarding telecommuting is typified by the views of Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Group PLC. Branson believes that telecommuting is an effective way for employees to get the job done while enjoying a better work-life balance. In defending the practice, Branson has gone so far as to say that forcing employees to work in a traditional office is a sign of "old school thinking".

Regardless of your personal viewpoints on telecommuting, we recommend that each organization assess whether telecommuting is a feasible or desirable option for its employees. Where organizations ultimately choose to offer telecommuting, a clear policy should be implemented. The following are some general guidelines that we recommend incorporating into telecommuting policies:

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[1] www.teleworkresearchnetwork.com

1. Consistent application is crucial. Arbitrarily allowing some employees to work from home and not others will most certainly cause a decline in employee morale;
2. Set clear performance goals for telecommuters to assess individual performance;
3. Reserve the right to monitor employee work and terminate any arrangement where performance is unsatisfactory; and
4. Ensure that employee health and safety is safeguarded in employees' remote work environments.

Please contact e2r Solutions® should you require assistance with your organization's telecommuting policy.