

A Vote For Working At Home

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The concept of open work is a relatively new one for me. If you had told me 10 years ago that I would be sitting here sending my staff an e-mail, talking on the phone with a colleague, and writing a blog, all from the comfort of my sofa at home—I would have told you that you were crazy. It is apparent that I am now living in a different world: a world where I panic if I leave the house without my Blackberry and see my laptop as an extension of myself. Yet, the silver lining to being connected 24/7 is that it not only enables me to get my work done from anywhere—it also allows me to do my work at a lower cost to the environment.

And it makes me wonder—are we really maximizing the impact that open work can have as a strategy to combat rising energy use, increased greenhouse gas emissions and the overall climate change crisis? In my home state of Massachusetts, more than 3 million people commute by car each day—73 percent of those commuters driving alone. Every year urban commuters in the U.S. waste 2.3 billion gallons of fuel idling in traffic—the equivalent of operating four large-scale power plants.

New emerging technologies have extended, if not dissolved, the boundaries of the corporate office and have forever altered the concept of what it means to be a 9 to 5 employee. The number of corporate employees in the United States open working in 2007 is expected to be 12.4 million, nearly double from five years ago. In the current global economy, we can now easily envision someone joining a business call from the beach in San Diego, a coffee shop in New York, and a corporate boardroom in Tokyo—with open work the flexibility is limitless and corporations around the world are cashing in on the savings.

Sun Microsystems is on the leading edge of this rising trend. Nearly half of the software company's 40,000 employees work from home whenever possible. The program is allowing Sun to attract and retain the best talent from around the world—while reducing its office space by one sixth. Participants report that their productivity has increased by 34 percent, in part because they have shaved their commuting time by three hours a week. For 2006, the program accomplished the equivalent of removing 6,700 cars from the road and eliminating 18,000 metric tons of CO2 emissions. Since the inception of the program in 2003, the California company has saved \$255 million. Now that is real money.

The Center for Biological Diversity is also using open work to its advantage. The environmental group's headquarters is located in Arizona, yet less than half of their 44 employees actually live in the state. Using open work as a hiring strategy enables the center to hire great talent that may otherwise opt to work elsewhere; many of its lawyers, for example, live in the Bay Area. In a world where funds are tight and the opportunities are endless—open work offers a money saving, low impact solution.

For me, technology still retains its many mysteries and pitfalls – but if it can enable me to get my work done, lower my impact on the environment, and allow me to take in my daughter's soccer game—I am on board. Even if it does require me to constantly ask my 12-year-old how exactly you go about returning a text message.

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address sustainability challenges such as global climate change.