

For Your Info

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The unemployment rate in Massachusetts rose from 4.9% in May to 5.2% in June. The rate for Massachusetts continues to be lower than the national unemployment rate, which remained at 5.5%. Through the first half of 2008, the Massachusetts unemployment rate averaged 4.6%, the same rate that was recorded in the first half of 2007.

Source: Labor and Workforce Development report (www.mass.gov)



Telecommuting - Is It A Viable Option?

Is it time to re-think telecommuting when we are paying for gas close to \$4.00 per gallon?

In the mid-1990s, the Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources and the Massachusetts Highway Department studied how telecommuting impacts individual workers, employers and society overall. In short, this study uncovered that telecommuters were:

- as productive, or more productive than, their non-telecommuting workers,
- happier, more dedicated employees,
- better able to maintain a balance between work and other obligations,
- a factor in reducing air pollution, highway congestion and fuel use.

Organizations participating in this study found that they enjoyed specific benefits as a result of telecommuting. These benefits included:

- improved employee morale,
- reduced overhead expenses, and
- improved employee attraction and retention.

Society benefits too. In this study, telecommuters drove an average of 31.5 fewer miles on the days that they telecommuted vs. the days they commuted to a work location. The average telecommuter in this study telecommuted 2.26 days per week. Assuming a couple of weeks of vacation time, this equates to approximately 3559.50 miles saved on an annual basis for one person!

The study also found that successful telecommuting programs often have the following components:

- Telecommuting is a formal program – not just a handshake
- It is voluntary – some employees may not have the resources, space or quiet at home to work effectively
- Performance measures are understood and agreed to before a telecommuting arrangement is launched

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If you are a Massachusetts employer, are you offering health insurance to your employees? This new law requires most Massachusetts residents (with some exceptions) to obtain health insurance by July 1, 2007. Most employers with 11 or more full-time employees are now required to offer health insurance to their employees. For more information visit www.mahealthconnector.org.

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In July of 2008, the IRS issued new standard mileage rates. The new rate for business miles is 58.5 cents per mile. In 2007, the rate for business miles was 48.5 cents. For more information, visit www.irs.gov.

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Based on our experience working with clients on developing telecommuting programs, we have found that:

- Some roles are more conducive to a successful telecommuting arrangement; while others are not
- Telecommuting arrangements should not be offered to employees who are struggling with performance issues
- Many companies offer it on a limited basis only – one day per week or every other Friday over the summer
- It is not an entitlement, it is a benefit
- Those who abuse the benefit, don't get another chance at a telecommuting arrangement

Sources: *Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation* (www.mass.gov); *The University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute*

Fact is Stranger Than Fiction

In December of 2007, Dr. Sagun K. Tuli, a neurosurgeon filed a discrimination suit against the prestigious Brigham and Women's Hospital and the neurosurgery chief of staff, Dr. Arthur L. Day. Tuli has charged that both Dr. Day and the hospital have given more favorable treatment to male colleagues with less experience. In depositions and affidavits by colleagues working at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Dr. Day had referred to his female coworkers as "girls". Another colleague said that he had downloaded sexually explicit materials onto a nurse's personal digital assistant and displayed an inappropriate sculpture on his desk from time to time. Additionally, one nurse commented that he kept a small box on his desk with bikini underwear. Another colleague said that she once heard Day tell Tuli during surgery "You're just a girl; you shouldn't be playing with this equipment."

Dr. Day denied these allegations. Stay tuned for more details as we follow this case.

Source: "Bias Suit rips Brigham surgical chief" by Michael Levenson, May 28, 2008, *The Boston Globe*