*This is a sample of the book **Telework People: How To Make Money And Get Your Life Back By Working Online**. A practical guide by Alexis Bellido.*

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# The Advantages of Teleworking

Teleworking affects not only employees, employers and self-employed, but also society. Let's review the main advantages for each one of these.

**Employees**

**Work better:** Many articles and reports mention an increase in productivity as one of the major benefits of telecommuting . But productivity can be a very subjective measure, and not every study defines it in the same way.

However, one thing is for sure: people are more motivated and tend to work better while working away from the conventional workplace, thus completing their tasks faster and meeting deadlines with improved quality. We

don't need many studies for knowing this, just ask your telecommutings friends. I can assure you I work more and better from home.

**Relax and get some time back:** Let's picture a typical day:

Wake up at 7:00am. You've got twenty minutes to shave (if you are a woman may need more time for make-up), get dress, have breakfast and get into your car.

You have to drive thirty minutes in a highway filled with hundreds of speeding cars just like yours, hoping to find a free parking spot when you arrive to the office. You get there just in time, 7:55am. Quickly check your calendar and email before the Monday meeting starts and a new day begins.

There are two events many of you will keep waiting all day: lunch time and 5:00pm. At the end of the day, driving back home, you'll need more than one hour because everybody, including your boss, is as anxious as you are. Welcome to rush hour.

And I have not talked about the job you are supposed to do at your office yet!

Now let's try this at home:

Wake up at 7:00am, get your slippers, a quick refresh at the bathroom, go to the kitchen and grab your favorite cup, we all have one, with some hot coffee. That's it!, you are ready for entering your studio, home office, bat cave or whatever you like to call it.

A new workday has begun. It's 7:30am, and you are as fresh as a lettuce.

Those who work at home, from a telecenter a few blocks away, or the coffee shop across the street, are less stressed than those that have to hurry up each morning and spend two hours, at least, a day just to get to work.

When working away from the office, your morale is high, you feel quite satisfied and wanting to get some real work done. Besides, let's admit it, we all enjoy it when hearing our neighbor's smokey Toyota hitting the road in the morning.

**Less interruptions from co-workers:** During the O'Reilly Open Source Convention, held in Portland, Oregon, in August 2005, programmer and writer Paul Graham gave a great keynote on what a business can learn from the open source movement. Paul made a quite interesting assertion: in most companies the "people pretending to work, interrupt the ones actually working." Let's rehearse a

common dialog at the office:

- "Hey Mike, did you get that expenses report ready?"

- "I am on it, just need to add last month's numbers and it's done. Did you watch the game last night?"

- "Yes!, good one. Hey!, did you know about Jill and Rose?"

- "What about them?"

- "They were found making some ... watch out ... big guy coming! err ... Yes! that is fine Mr. Smith, keep working on that report and let me know as soon as it is ready"

Do you have any idea of how many hours we lose while working in one of those cube filled buildings? Many people think that going to work is working. That's just spending time! Assisting to meetings, going to get some coffee, asking the guy in the next cubicle how the report is going (and about Jill and Rose). All those things are just burning time tricks.

Many occupations require a high degree of concentration: programming, writing a report, estimating taxes, attending technical support questions. If our friend Joe the Talker is all day bothering, I really doubt you will finish your job at

time.

Yes, I am sure there are some jobs where constant gossip and high coffee drinking volumes count as real production, but not many, not the ones most of us care about anyway.

**Flexibility:** Sometimes I feel better while writing at night, hearing just my keystrokes while everybody is sleeping at home. Mornings are great for doing some research, and I could certainly use this lovely sunny afternoon to get those designs I have in the back of my mind done.

I am a self-employed, and can manage my time according to when I feel is the best time for every task. But many companies are now allowing their telecommuters to manage their own time, in many cases they don't care if the job is done at morning or night, they just need it done before certain deadline.

Colorado based Alpine Access,  a call center services provider and one of the fastest growing companies in that state, allows their employees to choose the best hours and days for attending calls from their homes.

Most people can work better if they can choose what to do and when to do it.

**More money in your pocket:** How much do you spend

daily on fuel? How much did that nice suit cost you? Do you really need to pay that much for having a horrible tasting lunch anywhere when you could be having a delicious and healthier meal at home?

Staying at home can reduce, drastically, your daily spending. You may need to increase your budget at home if you don't already have a broadband connection or PC (who hasn't one these days?) but I believe this is a more efficient way of spending your hard earned money. And you know what? The advantages list is not over yet!

**You and your family require some quality time:** Don't you hate it when you have to promise your kids to take them to the zoo, or play some Playstation just "this Sunday"?, "dad!, but it's Monday, can't we do it sooner?"

I am not saying you have to spoil your children and do as they say whenever they say, but I really think that if you have a family, and love them as much as I love mine, then you need to spend more time with them. All the money you can make as the brand new Level C Systems Consultant at Mega Powerful Senseless Co., won't replace a kiss from your wife or seeing your little devils laughing.

Teleworking allows us to balance our lives. We work better when we have a happy family, and our children can

learn more about the importance of a good education and the true meaning of working and being responsible while watching you.

**Opportunities for the disabled and those living far:** Many people live too far from the urban centers and can't get a good job where they are. Others have some kind of disability that turns commuting into a nightmare, or simply impossible. By working remotely, all these persons, can be economically independent.

**Don't quit your job because of him/her:** The situation when one spouse has to leave a job because the family have to move or that long expected promotion requires traveling to other town, is quite common. If either partner could telecommute, the problem could be solved easily, reducing unpleasant discussions and, in some extreme cases, the possibility of divorce.

**Keep your eyes on the kids:** In most developed societies, women have a very important role in businesses, however, having children still can be a source of job related problems. Many women had to interrupt their careers to grow children. Not anymore.

A teleworker mother can work at home while keeping an eye on little Bob and Lucy, but ladies, please, don't take this

too literal, it doesn't necessarily mean that you will have more things to do, there are options.

You could hire somebody to help with childcare and domestic issues while telecommuting from your home studio and still being reachable if needed. Or you could work during the morning, when children are at school.

**Employers**

**Save on real state:** A company can reduce its real state budget by implementing a telecommuting program. IBM's case is one of the first and most well known. The big blue started a plan in 1995 to reduce real state costs by sending many of its consultants and salespeople back home, establishing a 4-to-1 employee-to-office-space ratio and making telecommuting mandatory. Many of IBM's employees welcomed the change, as they were already used to work remotely.

Many desks, offices and computers are not fully used during a normal day at the office. How many executives have you seen with just a screen saver running for hours? Consolidating office space thanks to teleworking is a big plus.

Many, now famous, businesses started in a garage, or at

least that is what the legend tells us, but now, there is no longer the need for moving to an ultra modern building to keep growing. Most traditional companies and executives still suffer the "edifice complex", that is how Jack Nilles called the idea of needing an impressive office building to show value and prestige. I say the big building is history. Alpine Access has 100% of its agents working from home, they are more than 3000 people. Can you imagine how much it would cost renting office space for all of them?

In the United States, the United Kingdom and many other countries, government agencies are implementing teleworking to reduce real state costs too.

**Attract more and better people:** Offering flexible work models, like teleworking, companies can get many fine professionals aboard, employees who may live in other city or country, and for whom relocating is not an option.

Also, retention of highly skilled workers, who could be moving to another town, increases when the employers offer the option of working remotely.

Several surveys have shown that employees would prefer quitting a job when not having other options available.

**Lower absenteeism levels:** A simple cold can be reason

enough for not showing at work for many. I wouldn't like driving one hour in the cold morning with my nose dripping and a headache, just to arrive to an office full of people, with phones ringing all day and everybody talking simultaneously.

I'm sure many of your employees could complete a report from home and send it by email to the office. With a warm cup of tea by their side, of course.

A broken leg will keep your most valuable employee away from the big building at least a couple of months, but she could use her Internet connection and laptop to get the work done from her living room while fully recovering.

Most companies implementing teleworking programs will reduce long term disability costs.

**Be everywhere at any time:** If your company runs a teleworking program, you could have a worldwide distributed team, covering many different time zones. The Europe guys can be working while the America based are sleeping, offering 24/7 attention to your clients.

**Get the work done during emergencies:** Your team can continue working, from home or any other place in the world, when there are snow or ice storms, floods,

earthquakes, viral illnesses, power outages and even terrorist attacks. The more distributed and virtualized your company is, the better.

Maybe not all teleworkers can be productive during all emergencies, but at least a significant part of your workforce will be there to help.

**Spend less money and time in travels:** I read a story in the second edition of *Working Anywhere*, a British publication on teleworking. The story tells about the Royal Bank of Scotland's chairman waiting for a flight at Edinburgh airport, where he noticed many bank employees who were also ready to take the same flight. When the plane arrived, it was full of bank staff. Now they have a better control on who needs to travel and why.

The Royal Bank of Scotland executives were wasting a lot of productivity time, and thousands of pounds a month, in business related travels. They implemented video conferencing facilities in many of the bank's locations and have, since then, reduced the need for many travels and face to face meetings.

Does your company really need to send two of your most valuable employees out of town to demonstrate your latest software application? Remote controlling and collaboration

software tools can facilitate quick and easy virtual meetings.

**Self-employed**

I will not talk about all the benefits of being a self-employed. I'll just mention those related to teleworking. This group shares many of the advantages enjoyed by employees, and a few others:

**You are your own boss:** When running your own business you can decide each and every aspect of it: which services you want to offer and the best way of selling them, what kind of clients to attend, the projects you want to be involved with, and who you'll include in your team. There is much more responsibility, of course, but you are truly independent and in charge of your own destiny.

**Decide how much you want to earn:** Most companies pay their employees a fixed salary, often it is less than what the company is charging its clients. It has to be this way, companies are in the market to make a profit.

When you are by your own, you can charge what you really want to earn and know is fair. Nobody better than you to assess the real value of what you know. You need to consider your years of studying and work experience, and be paid accordingly.

**You can better manage your time:** Do you prefer writing at midnight? Or waking up at 5:00 am, while your husband and kids are still in bed, to continue working on your latest design?

Not all telecommuting employees can do this, but being a self-employed you have full control of your days and nights.

## Society

**Taking care of our planet:** Millions of cars slowly moving in highways all over the world, taking people to work, are one of the greatest contributors to the greenhouse effect and global warming. A car gives off twenty pounds of $CO_2$ per gallon of gas used. Reducing the number of vehicles in the streets and favoring remote working can reduce this big impact in our environment. Less pollution also means less health problems for many people.

Many forests are being destroyed to build more buildings and highways. Is this really needed? Do all the white collar guys really need their fancy offices and huge parking lots? I prefer a nice park where our children could play while daddy works, Wi-Fi connected, sitting on a bench. I am not saying "destroy all buildings and highways!", but we could make better use of the space, cleaner and healthier use, by promoting telecommuting.

All the energy resources and money invested on constructing skyscraper, new roads and more automobiles, could be better spent to improve education, health and quality of life of many people around the world.

**Enjoying your community:** Most people don't even know their neighbors. We are all too busy running to the office in the morning. Who are the parents of your children's friends at school? Are you aware that your town have a new library with great books and that you can assist, with your family, to free theater plays on Sundays?

Some studies have found that the time a teleworker gains by not commuting is used to do more work. But you could use some of your extra time to enjoy your family and be a more involved member of the community, participating in activities such as: helping to plant a tree in the new park, donating some books to the local library and reading them to children or assisting to a soccer or baseball game with the kids.

Living in a society is about living with humans. Enjoying the time together while making the world a better place. Too idealistic to be true? Maybe, but we can try a new lifestyle when breaking the chains that tie us to a fixed workplace.

**More opportunities for everybody:** Many people in my country use to think that "Lima is Peru." It's true that Lima, the capital, is where most of the population live and businesses are based. There are more job opportunities in a urban center, and that is true in many countries.

In an online discussion about the role of telecenters in our society, Ian McAllister, a Wales based business consultant said: "Here in Wales we are a good example. Cardiff is as affluent/developed as London (never seen so many Ferrari's and Porsche's in my life!), and broadband access is high. Go up the valleys and it drops every mile, almost as the employment measure drops as well. Computer availability also drops equally."

The right combination of ICT, human resources and management, can open a new world for many people living in rural areas. People that could telework for companies, or clients, no matter where they are located.

Governments should have an important role in these initiatives.

A program on a remote archipelago in the South West of Finland used telecenters to train and offer the required infrastructure to almost 200 self-employed, who were later hired by companies all over the country.

The effort required substantial public funding and allowed the creation of jobs in a place where geographical location was a great obstacle.

**Lowering maintenance costs:** Not only we have less pollution with fewer cars on the streets, but also reduce the wear and tear on the roadways and the costs for maintaining them. Telecommuters' vehicles require less fuel and visits to the mechanic.

**Preventing accidents:** Thousands of people die each year on the roads, not only by car accidents, but also due to road rage, a behavior that has been labeled as a mental disorder by several specialists.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration declared road rage the most pressing traffic safety problem facing America and the U.S. Highway Safety Office has testified to Congress that tens of thousands of accidents each year can be linked directly to aggressive driving.

Isn't it ironic that many innocents are dying because there are so many stressed, irresponsible, and even sick, persons racing on the highways trying to get earlier to jobs they hate?