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## Seeking Loyal, Devoted Workers? Let Them Stay Home

 By **ANDREA COOMBES**  
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Asked to identify the most devoted, loyal employees at their company, many people would probably point to colleagues who are at their desks before everyone else arrives and who remain there after everyone else leaves.

But that answer may be wrong.

A recent survey finds that workers who telecommute from home or elsewhere, while still a very small portion of the work force, report the highest levels of satisfaction with their jobs and loyalty to their employers. In the poll of about 10,000 U.S. workers, 73% of remote and home-based workers said they were satisfied with their company as a place to work, compared with 64% of office workers.



### <sup>1</sup> Q&A

A manager at Convergys talks with WSJ.com's Dana Mattioli about the **challenges of working with a home-based team of employees**<sup>2</sup>.


In addition, 70% of the telecommuters said they were "proud to tell people I work for my company," while only 64% of office workers agreed with that statement. The survey was conducted by the Kenexa Research Institute, a unit of Kenexa Corp., a recruitment and retention consulting firm.

"When companies allow employees to work remotely or from home, they are explicitly communicating to them that 'I trust you to be dedicated to the accomplishment of the work, even if I'm not able to observe you doing it,'" says Jack Wiley, executive director of the institute, which is in Minneapolis. "It boils down to respect," he says. "I respect you and I have confidence in your commitment to the work -- to do this under the conditions and at the time you feel will be most productive for you."

That rings true to Scott Berry, a senior mutual-fund analyst at Morningstar Inc., in Chicago. Mr. Berry has worked for the firm for eight years. For the past six, he has telecommuted from his home in Rochester, Mich., going into the office just two or three days a month.

"I always had a good perception of the firm, but obviously it enhances my perception in that they're willing to trust their employees to get their job done without any direct supervision, that they're willing to allow somebody like me to move for family reasons and not business reasons," says Mr. Berry, who started telecommuting when he and his wife started their family and wanted to be closer to relatives in Michigan.

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The perks of his current job, he says, include time saved not commuting, enjoying meals with his family, and not having colleagues interrupt him as they walk by his desk. The downsides include not getting to know colleagues as well. He also says his family can be a distraction. "But I think productivity is better, not worse," he says. "There are distractions being a telecommuter, but there are distractions in the office, too."

Leila Langlois, a recruiter at a large tech company in Silicon Valley, says her productivity has improved since she started telecommuting about a year ago from her home in San Francisco. "I'm way more productive working from home," says Ms. Langlois, who works in the office once a week to stay connected to co-workers. She says she has "received more awards in the last year" than in any other of her 10 years at the company. "I go above and beyond, trying to do really well to make sure I keep this job forever," says Ms. Langlois, who is married with two children.

In the Kenexa Research Institute survey, some of the differences between the two groups were striking, Mr. Wiley says, pointing to the 10-percentage-point gap between the 54% of telecommuters who said there is "open, honest two-way communication" at their company and the 44% of office workers who said that.

Fifty-three percent of the remote workers said they weren't considering leaving the company within 12 months, while only 46% of the office workers said leaving wasn't a consideration.

In addition, 58% of the telecommuters said "senior management demonstrates that employees are important to the success of the company," compared with 51% of the office workers. And 53% of the telecommuters said they believed senior management speaks honestly, versus 44% of the office workers.

Despite their higher job satisfaction, only a very small portion of the 10,000 workers surveyed actually work outside the cubicle: Just 4% said they work from home or remotely, a percentage that has remained fairly steady for years.

To some degree, Mr. Wiley says, that's because companies don't embrace work-at-home policies. "For many companies, there is still a command-and-control mentality," he says. "It's based on the notion that if you can't see the employee at work or can't walk down the hall and stick your head into the office, then you don't have a sense of just how productive they are."

There are other concerns, he adds. Companies may worry "about how they administer a policy like this in a fair way across the board for employees." In addition, some companies worry about the costs involved, including the expense of buying laptop computers and other tools when similar equipment has already been purchased for the office.

But companies do reap benefits from employing workers who are satisfied and committed to them. "We have a significant amount of experience and research that's shown a link between employee engagement and a whole host of very desirable outcomes, including an employee's willingness to expend discretionary effort to get the job done and their intention to stay with their employer," Mr. Wiley says.

In addition, "there's a substantial amount of research that shows that higher levels of employee engagement are predictive of higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty and improvement in market share," he says.

Mr. Wiley says other research shows that when people are asked to name the most important things they want from an employer besides compensation, they say they want appreciation for the work they contribute and to be treated respectfully. "This desire escapes the attention of many managers and employers," he adds.

He also says the survey has a message for employees. It shows that "there are employers out there who do provide this flexibility," he says. And "for most people, that's a huge plus."

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