

# VIEWPOINT

## SOUTHWEST

Voices From the **Construction Industry**

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## Why Working From Home Is No Longer Just a Benefit

**BY JULI SMITH**

As a recruiter specializing in the A&E market, if I had a dollar for every time candidates said the No. 1 reason they'd consider leaving their current job is the ability to work from home, I could retire now.

In fact, a 2017 survey conducted by Glassdoor revealed that working from home (WFH) is the No. 1 benefit employees say they want, and 88% of all respondents said they strongly prefer a company with a WFH program. A majority also said they value WFH more than the amount of their annual compensation.

The success of WFH procedures established during the pandemic has surprised many "old dogs" in the industry who say they never thought it could work. But what does that mean for the future? And why should you consider making it a permanent employee benefit?

Here are a few reasons: The average in-house cost to hire a professional is \$14,936, and that increases for higher-level positions, according to the Society for Human Resource Management. Forbes magazine reported in May 2019 that it takes eight to 12 weeks to hire a replacement, bringing the three-month downtime costs

for losing just one "knowledge worker" to more than \$25,000.

Also, a two-year Stanford University study shows that employers who offer WFH options have seen their annual employee turnover rates fall by 50%. More than two-thirds of millennials, who make up a large share of the workforce, and are expected to be 75% of the global workforce by 2025, consider WFH a primary decision point in selecting an employer. WFH can improve employee culture and job satisfaction levels in a way that no other benefit does.

What does this tell us? It tells us that WFH is no longer an optional benefit. And it means we can expect our people to request the WFH option, if it's not already in place. But the window is closing rapidly on offering it as a high-impact benefit. It has become a requirement for retaining current employees and attracting the talent we need in the post-COVID-19 workplace.

However, WFH is not without its challenges, as many managers have shared with me in the past several months. Initially, it demands more time—from senior leadership all the way to project managers—and a more active, engaged management

style. Many managers have had to switch to delegating tasks in smaller pieces and shorter time frames, in addition to conducting daily video team huddles.

And it doesn't mean that everyone who wants to work from home should be allowed to do so, or that everyone will want to work from home, at least not 100% of the time. A fourth-quarter 2019 CNBC survey said that 82% of the workforce wants the opportunity to work from home at least one day a week, and 57% said they want that option two to three days a week. The latter is the most common request that recruiters get.

Not only will a broader WFH policy boost employee retention, it also will expand access to people who aren't living within a daily commute of the office. As the economy bounces back, we will eventually return to a tight labor market, and offering a WFH option allows companies to expand their talent pools.

Here's a quote from a manager in an old PSMJ blog: "I guess I'm just old school, or maybe I'm a dinosaur, but I'm not on board with this work from home, flex-time thing."

We all know what happened to the dinosaurs.