

Home insecurity

Office face time
trumps the
telecommute as
layoff fears rise

By Julie Forster
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When should you be in the office? These days, when your boss is. In this era of falling sales and rising layoffs, jittery workers are trying to stand out. For some, the drive to shine means more face time in the office. And that's putting some telecommuting plans on hold.

At the same time, some companies that have cut jobs are pulling back on work-from-home arrangements to gain more control over the remaining work force.

Ia Lo, 34, a consumer behavior analyst at Best Buy, says she's never been a big telecommuter, working from her Brooklyn Park home only occasionally.

Most recently, she says she doesn't consider it. "I'd rather do most of the work right here," she said from Best Buy's Richfield headquarters.

After a round of buyouts and layoffs, Lo's department was restructured and she has a new boss. She says it's important to be in the office to get that face time, to learn what her new boss expects and about her new roles and responsibilities.

World at Work, an Arizona-based human-resources trade group, says that while occasional telecommuting has risen in the U.S. over the past few years, it estimates that the number of workers telecommuting "almost every day" has declined by 2.2 million between 2006 and 2008, to 13.5 million.

John McKee, author of "Career Wisdom — 101 Proven Ways to Ensure Workplace Success," offers this advice to workers these days: Be in the office whenever the boss is in, whether that's on the weekends

or late at night.

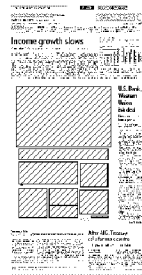
"Let her or him see that you share the same work ethic," he advises. "Simply put, if your boss is at work, you should be as well."

Over the past five months, Stacey DeKalb, a Minneapolis employment attorney who advises companies, has seen a move away from work-from-home arrangements among some of her clients. "With the cutbacks going on in companies, that can be a good excuse to get rid of telecommuters," DeKalb said.

Susan Seitel, president of WFC Resources, a Minnetonka company that advises companies on workplace flexibility programs, laments the shift. "Telecommuting sends a clear message: We believe in you, we trust you, and we are taking our eyes off the clock," she said. Clamping down on these flexible arrangements

TELECOMMUTE DECLINE, 3C › undermines workplace cultures that have been based on trust, she says.

Meanwhile, the state Department of Transportation is get-



ting ready to launch a program aimed at convincing companies to expand telecommuting options as a way to ease traffic congestion on metro highways. The agency hopes to get 2,000 workers off the roads at least one day a week.

Agency officials see challenges ahead. In a written draft describing its plan, career advancement is seen as an obstacle to getting employees to participate. Some employees think it could hurt their career "as their lack of presence in the office indicates to their employer that they are not working, hence the phrase, 'out of sight, out of mind,'" according to the document.

Kenneth Buckeye, who is managing the telecommuting effort for the state, is getting

ready for some surprises.

"We will be learning a lot and learning things we hadn't anticipated when we first started the project in terms of how employers react and how employees react in tougher times."

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**EARNINGS
 COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS
 Fourth Qtr. ended Dec. 31**

(in thousands, except per share)

	2008	2007
Revenue	\$28,405	\$28,451
Net Inc.	\$1,370	\$1,452
Per Share	\$0.17	\$0.17
12 Months		
Revenue	\$122,700	\$121,243
Net Inc.	\$6,611	\$7,511
Per Share	\$0.77	\$0.85

COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS (Nasdaq: JCS), Minnetonka, provides connectivity infrastructure for broadband networks and voice-grade connecting devices and wiring.

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