

apropos



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A Negative in the Zero Commute

Judging from the subject lines of my SPAM-mail, the concept of "firing the boss" and "working from home" are hot topics for a lot of folks. Apparently the concept of working from home conjures up images of an ideal work environment with all sorts of side-benefits built into the scenario. I've been working exclusively from a home office for the last six years, and there are certainly some benefits to it (personally, I get a lot of laundry done in the time I would have been distracted at the water cooler), but it's not without some drawbacks.

I was talking last week to a fellow consultant who also works at home. We've been good friends for a long time, and very few topics are off-limits for us. The topic for this particular day was home offices and families and how they sometimes just don't mix. We were in the mood to vent, and we did. Later I thought that our conversation might be of interest to others who may be considering working from home, or are envious of those who do. In either case, this should help put some perspective on the realities of work-from-home scenarios.

Our observation is that a home office doesn't seem to command the respect that an office located in the corporate compound does. Our beef is that our family members sometimes don't recognize that it should. We went through the list of atrocities that happen in home offices that just don't happen "at work":

- a continual migration of office supplies away from their expected location in-my-office-where-I-need-them: ruler, tape, stapler, mechanical pencils, scissors
- someone else's leftovers left between the edge of the keyboard and the mouse pad (a particularly unwelcoming start to the day)
- the Web page changed from where you last left it
- specially sorted stacks of paper are re-sorted, covered up, or (maybe the worst), knocked off the desk into the trash
- people walking into the room talking loudly when you're on a business call, e.g., "MOM? Where are my baseball socks?" (My fellow consultant has started locking the door when he's on a call.)
- other family members accidentally answering the business line, or, more likely, using it because the family phone is in use at the time
- other computer-capable family members sysadmining your machines, e.g., default printer, default router, etc.
- competition for keyboard time, e.g., Junior wants to play computer games.

Don't get me wrong; there are many up-sides to working from a home office; I just haven't touched on those here. But our collective experience suggests there are a few innate problems with a zero commute as well.