



Will Home-Based Business Soon Become Workplace Gospel?

By Erin Huffstutter

I'm not hip to the lives and loves of celebrities. I've never been accused of being fashion forward. I don't drive a Hummer. So it was an altogether new sensation when I recently opened my newspaper and learned that I, Erin Home-Worker, am setting a trend.

In a May 2006 report, titled *Work, Entrepreneurship & Opportunity In 21st Century America*, the US Chamber of Commerce stated:

“Traditional employment remains strong in our economy... Yet participants in the entrepreneurial workforce have cast aside the traditional model of working for one employer, for one paycheck, and on a set schedule that never changes.

Responding to new economic, technological, and social conditions, millions of workers and companies are instead making alternative arrangements and are seeking different opportunities. These arrangements assume a variety of forms including flex time, telecommuting, independent contracting, working as a temp or on an on-call basis, home-based businesses, and starting a small business full time.”

The report went on to list some fabulous stats about our flourishing flock:

- Nearly 20 million Americans – one in six workers – work from home at least once a week. 70% of these are telecommuters, 30% are self-employed.
- 18.6 million small firms were without employees, and 53% were home-based businesses, underscoring the entrepreneurial structure of this vibrant sector of our economy.

- In November 2005, 10.2 million Americans identified themselves as self-employed – constituting an impressive 7.2% of the workforce.

It's great to see an official report validating our existence. But for those of us living the life, it's like preaching to the choir. Any *Schmo* can look around and see factors like rising health-care costs, the dissolution of pension plans, wanting to spend more time with family, and the way many employers change personnel like they change trousers – and the revolution seems obvious.

Karen Braschuk, a 48-year old entrepreneur and fellow home-biz convert, has seen the light. It not only inspired her to start her own Virtual Assistant business, Office Support 911, but has changed her mind about the future of the workplace.

“From personal experience, I believe companies are becoming *more* comfortable with the entire concept of telecommuting and dealing with outside contractors,” said Braschuck. “I am a Virtual Assistant and my entire industry barely existed 10 years ago. But then, all this amazing new technology crept in and suddenly we had laptops and Blackberries and email. I gradually realized that there was ‘virtually’ nothing I performed in the office that I couldn’t also do from home.”

Once Braschuk recognized a remote office wouldn't impede performance, the leap of faith into entrepreneurship was easy. “My physical absence from the office had absolutely no affect on my ability to perform my duties, and it was seamless to my customers and co-workers. Now that I'm a business-owner, I have one client who I've never even met face-to-face, yet we have a great relationship over the phone and via email. If I were sitting next to her in an office, it wouldn't make my quality of work for her any better or quicker.”

In my opinion, the government's new “official” awareness of the strength and growth potential of home-based workers is great news for those of use who are already believers. Not only does this translate to more compatriots in the new economy, but hopefully an economic shift that better embraces the flexibility and ingenuity upon which our kind thrive. Surprisingly, the US Chamber of Commerce report put it best:

“Entrepreneurship and the independence that comes with owning a business and being one’s own boss remain our country’s distinct advantage. It explains our vibrancy, creativity, resiliency, and growth. Indeed, it helps explain why millions of people seek to immigrate to American each year. Small business entrepreneurs need flexibility, especially in the use of their own labor and access to others to succeed. Governments at all levels must shape laws and regulations that provide workers and businesses with maximum flexibility to meet the changes and realities of the 21st century economy and craft rules that help it succeed.”

Can I get an *Amen*?

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