

BUSINESS CONTINUATION

PLANNER 2011

REMOTE POSSIBILITIES

By **ASHLEY FLETCHER FRAMPTON**
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When a storm hit Washington, D.C. this past winter, many offices were shut down, but the U.S. General Services Administration had about 60% of its employees operational, according to Elham Shirazi, a

telework consultant. The federal agency had tested and implemented a policy allowing employees to work from home, Shirazi said. When the snowstorm made commuting difficult, those employees knew what to do.

"So for them, it was just another day of work," said Shirazi, principal of the firm e-planning, speaking at a conference in Charleston.

Shirazi advises businesses and government entities on setting up telework programs, but not just so that they can keep functioning in a natural disaster. In fact, she said the word "telework" has replaced

TELEWORKING CAN LEAD TO HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY AND HELPS A BUSINESS TO KEEP FUNCTIONING IN A DISASTER

"telecommute" because the benefits of working from home go beyond the avoided trek to the office.

Businesses that enable employees to work remotely can realize higher productivity, as employees are freed from office distractions like co-workers stopping by to chat. Other potential advantages are improved morale, cost savings on office space and a smaller carbon footprint, Shirazi said.

Setting it up right

But in order to produce positive results, telework programs must be designed correctly, she said. For starters, giving employees the ability to work from home, even one or two days a week, should not be thought of as a benefit. While it might be attractive to some employees, calling it a benefit implies that it is available to anyone.

"Being in a creative field, I find that sometimes it's easier to be creative in your own space. Also, I'm a night owl."

Kelly Tam
marketing, public relations and event planning, Dennis Corp.

Businesses should approach telework as a strategic management strategy, used only for jobs that can be performed outside the office, she said.

"It's about jobs first, not who sits in those jobs," Shirazi said.

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PREPARING FOR DISASTER

By **ALLISON COOKE OLIVERIUS**
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For Sandy Stone of Island Realty, creating a business continuity plan has been an eye-opening experience. Island Realty is a property management company for which the busiest time of year is hurricane season, so it's critical Stone and his employees have a plan in place to communicate with property owners and their guests in the event of an emergency.

A business continuity plan is "a communication vehicle that allows as many people, employees, vendors,

clients and the public at large to know what has happened, or will happen ... The more we are able to stay in communication with all parties involved, the better and more relaxed everyone will be going in to the disaster and after the disaster," Stone said. "Planning is key to this outcome."

Stone's continuity plan is about 80% complete and has already provided a sense of relief heading into hurricane season.

"By putting this plan together, it has really opened my eyes to the needs for the future and allowed us to work somewhat worry-free," he said.

People, property, place and processes

Scott Cave, a certified planner with Atlantic Business Continuity Services in Summerville, has been working with Stone to create Island Realty's business continuity plan.

"We need to be aware of natural disasters, of course, and plan for them, but they don't happen too often, thankfully," Cave said.

Far more common are IT failures, human error, power outage or illness of key personnel.

"The point is, if you have a good

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WELCOME

The Association of Small Business Development Centers reports that one in four businesses will experience a crisis at some point. Of those, 43% will never reopen and of those that do reopen, only 29% will still be open two years later.

Becoming a statistic is avoidable if you take the time to examine the potential threats you and your company face and then create a plan to handle them. We hope the information within this year's *Business Continuation Planner* will help you do just that.

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TECHNOLOGY

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Next, businesses should evaluate whether the people who hold those jobs are self-motivated and performing well already.

Another key is teaching managers to evaluate employees using performance measures, which should be the case whether the work is done inside the office or outside, she said.

Technology is advancing in ways that enable more employees to get their work done outside of the office, Shirazi said. More people are accessing their work e-mail from home — or constantly via smartphones — and technology is becoming more secure.

Often the systems and equipment that pave the way for teleworking are in place long before businesses make it a formal option for employees.

"A lot of times the technology is ahead because we're working nonstop," Shirazi said.

Technologically savvy

Equipping employees with mobile technology has been a priority for Dan Dennis, president of Dennis Corp., an engineering, surveying and construction management firm based in Columbia.

Investing in technology has an up-front cost, but it makes sense for a company that has half of its employees frequently working on job sites and in multiple offices around the state, Dennis said.

"We're technologically savvy," Dennis said. "We're engineers, so we have to be to stay ahead of our competition."

At Dennis Corp., each of the roughly 90 employees has a company-issued BlackBerry phone. Surveyors and inspectors have trucks with mobile laptop stations. Conference rooms are set up for Skype meetings with people in other offices or working off-site. Hours and expenses can be tracked and filed electronically from



Kelly Tam usually works from home providing marketing, public relations and event planning services for Dennis Corp. Photo/James T. Hammond

any location.

Dennis, 42, said most of his employees are younger than he is; many have been computer-literate nearly their entire lives and do not identify with spending long days in the office. He leaves it up to his managers to decide how and where employees work.

Sometimes, he said, you can get just as much work done on a BlackBerry as you can in the office.

Dennis said that equipping employees to work from home, or wherever else they might be, does not come with an expectation that they work more hours.

"Does technology make people work more? I don't think so," he said. "It's flexibility."

Working from home

Shirazi said there are misconceptions about allowing employees to work from home, and one is that it is a day off. Another misconception is that telework is a good arrangement for child care if the employee is full time.

However, caring for her children is one reason Kelly Tam, who does market-

ing, public relations and event planning for Dennis Corp., decided to go part time and work from her home. The fact that the company had the right technology and culture made it a no-brainer for her, Tam and Dennis said.

When she started with the company in 2006 as a full-time employee, Tam worked about 20 hours in the office and 20 from home. Dennis Corp. has a virtual private network that allows employees to access their desktops and all files on the server from a laptop.

Having a second child in 2008 was the impetus for Tam to scale back her hours and connect from home. But the strategy also fits with her personality and the work she does.

"Being in a creative field, I find that sometimes it's easier to be creative in your own space," Tam said. "Also, I'm a night owl."

Working late at night at the office is difficult, but working late on a laptop at home is not, she said.

Because of her company's technology systems, some days Tam doesn't even crack her laptop. Dennis Corp. has a server that immediately downloads emails sent from her BlackBerry into her email, making them searchable no matter how she's accessing them.

"There are days that I literally solely work from my BlackBerry," she said.

While the arrangement fits Tam and her company well, Shirazi said remote working isn't for everyone. Even if their jobs could be done at home, she said some employees need the structure of an office and daily face-to-face conversations with co-workers.

For that reason, she said that managers contemplating a telework policy should not expect that everyone will flee the office. ■

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Willis Cantey,
President of Cantey
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