



Working Effectively From Wherever You Are

(Getting More of the Right Work Done in Less Time)

“The office is where you are—not where it is.”

“Work is something you do—not a place you go.”

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In this paper we will discuss:

- A working definition of the Mobile Work Environment (MWE).
- Major trends of the MWE.
- Issues and solutions on learning to work in the MWE.
- Tips on working effectively in your MWE.

EVOLVING WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Why Now?

At least since the 1970's, and probably for many years before, the business world has been seeking sound alternatives to what has evolved into "Dilbert's Cubicles." Our clients have told us they have known for years that at any given time their office space was often thinly occupied by staff and they were paying excessive fixed overhead expenses which depleted the bottom-line. Clients also told us of their concern that employees often got into ruts, restricting their conversations and brainstorming envelope to a repetitive and limited number of contacts.

It now appears wherever you turn in the working community that "alternative" offices are being explored, embraced, and adapted. Why now early in the 21st century is this continuing to happen? One word—technology.

Technology has brought us mobile computing, personal information managers, cell phones, pagers, email, vmail, instant messaging, satellite phones, the internet & organizational intranets and portals, Skype, BlackBerrys, text messaging, scanners, and multi-functional devices. Each of these technologies has contributed to the distillation of the office culture or "Distributed Work", as coined by Jim Ware and Charlie Grantham in their benchmark book *Corporate Agility* (<http://www.corporateagilitybook.com>).

Today's mobile communications gives us the ability to store and retrieve information (given that we correctly implement and practice effective organizational principles) from wherever we are, whenever we want.

High-speed, broadband wireless technology has given us access and continual connectivity to whatever we want, from wherever we are, whenever we need it. Now, there is a downside and an upside to all this. Just have lunch in most restaurants (some lately have been smart enough to deal with this problem) and you'll hear the "ringing" – the downside. Conversely, what great customer service it is to be able to respond to an urgent client need from your car, an airport, or even, if you must, when jogging—the upside. Today, more than ever, "The office is where you are—not where it is."

The entry of wireless communication into the office allows all-the-time and real-time global access to almost anyone - anywhere. Fast, reliable connectivity to email, vmail, and the corporate server has made it unnecessary for employees to be anchored to a specific geographic location. Factor in the internet and intranet or corporate portals, coupled with instant messaging, and it becomes even clearer how technological advances have forever changed the needs of the workspace of today and tomorrow. We can, because of technology, be wherever we need or want to be and accomplish our work. And again, "The office is where you are—not where it is."

What is a "Mobile Work Environment"?

Although change is a constant, the speed of change in the work environment, granted us by technology, has powered-up to today's net-speed 24/7 culture. We think the best lexicon for this new work environment is "Mobile Work Environment" or "MWE."

In addition to Jim and Charlie's "Distributed Work," organizations have also identified this process by a wide variety of titles including Hewlett-Packard's "Workplace Transformation" project and Jones Lang LaSalle's "Workplace Strategies (WS) project." Other terms used are the virtual, hoteling, freespace, and mobile office.

We prefer to view this workplace change as continuing evolutionary steps and therefore have selected Mobile Work Environment (MWE) as a term which correctly describes the various paths of change being traveled in the workplace. Regardless of what the MWE is called, there is no doubt it is, and will always remain, a "work in progress." Clearly, five years from now work processes and tools will be much different than they are today.

Working out of a home office

Whether working for others, or on our own, the closest many of us come to an 'office' can be found in our homes. Home Office space situations can be broadly divided into three basic types:

- Small Home-Based Business: (Easiest)
 - Few, if any, staff
 - All information & decision making are at one location

- Entrepreneur (More difficult)
 - Consultants, Independent Sales Reps, Writers, etc.
 - Work with few people at a time
 - Gather information from a wide array of sources
 - Used as a base to travel from

- Corporate Employees (Most Difficult)
 - Managers, Administrative, Staff Consultants, Sales
 - Interface with large groups of people
 - Large volume of information routinely exchanged with many
 - Many varied sources of information
 - Strong need to be connected to others

Common Denominators

All three types of home offices have two common denominators which must be addressed in order for them to work effectively. They are:

1) Making choices with personal issues.

This is both a plus and a minus. From a plus side, you don't need to get dressed, put on make-up or shave, and spend time commuting. And, without question, an important contributor to corporate Green initiatives. No one can see what you look like when you're in your home. Well not in most cases – the growing use of video will have its own set of issues to be dealt with over the next few years. The core issue for both those who work in a home office environment and those who supervise home office workers is the result of work, not hours worked.

Since we and most of our associates are home office workers, we can tell you from first hand experience that if anything, most home office workers work too many hours – not too few. "Measuring by results" both for the worker and management is the only thing that counts. Our somewhat blunt observation is that managers fear losing control and leaders measure by results.

If a home office worker goes to her daughter's soccer game for an hour or two—that's a wonderful quality of life improvement which can bring high return to any organization. Go to that soccer game! Yet make sure to establish routine working hours to get out of the office on time. We do so, and know that with the application of PEP habits and planning principles that other home office workers can also put in a fully productive, yet reasonable, work day.

2) Understanding that Organizational Systems and the Control of Information is a critical issue.

If you are a corporate worker with a home office and are some distance away from the corporate facility, you can't afford to not have access to all the information you need to complete your work. Control and organization of both paper (if you have any) and electronic-based information is critical to the effective accomplishment of work. Although the ability to move files and documents through the internet as either links or attachments is routine, it is still not easy to get assistance from others to share information. The reality is there is a good chance the people you're looking to for assistance are also working in a MWE and may not be easily available at the moment you need them. More than ever, we must take (read as invest) the time to plan, prioritize, and anticipate our future work needs.

The Proper Work Tools for the MWE

Everyone working in the MWE needs to have the proper equipment in order to be productive and effective. In most situations, the proper equipment means a reasonably current, powerful computer with current versions of the organization's software such as Microsoft's OUTLOOK or IBM's NOTES as well as the organization's correct tools for mobile work such as read-write CDs, DVDs, flash memory sticks, scanners, printers, a fax machine, a cell phone, PIMs, and perhaps, an instant messaging system. These types of tools are usually considered "normal fare" in an office. The move to the MWE requires alignment and upgrading as necessary of these work tools to best support your new work mode.

One of the most often heard comments from the people we work with is, "I have to keep this document/information in my paper files because it's not available electronically." We then ask if a scanner is available. Too often, people are not utilizing scanners anywhere near to the capability this tool has to support the MWE. A scanner is the best way to control the volume of paperwork that tends to come across your desk. With a home office you are unlikely to have enough space for vital things let alone the never ending accumulation of paper.

The scanner provides an important component to solving the paper/paperless issue. Virtually all information, including old typewritten letters, pictures, magazine articles, and hand-written notes can be converted into electronic data.

It is most important to remember that with scanned documents, as with all other electronic documents, the core issue still remains how to organize and store information so it can be quickly retrieved when it is needed.

Work Issues in the MWE Home Office

An effective Home Office is one which creates an efficient environment to control, maintain, and retrieve information which is used to plan and complete work. The factors which make it effective are:

1) Dedicated Work Space: This is imperative. The dining room or kitchen table does not work. Within a small apartment the dedicated space may be a screened off area of a room. In a modest home or larger apartment the Home Office space may be a section of a room. And, of course, in a large home one room can usually be dedicated to the home office.

2) Furniture • needs to be of high quality: This is not to say that you need to spend lots of money. Your options include buying new furniture from a major manufacturer who has designed products for the home office worker. Most corporations have negotiated very attractive deeply discounted pricing with major office furnishing manufacturers. Office furnishings is one of those businesses where 50% or more off list price means you've got a fair deal.

Today, there is a glut of used office furniture on the market which will work very well and can be bought for pennies on the dollar.

The one place where we would strongly recommend that you “invest” some money is in a first rate chair. We have sat on Herman Miller’s Aaron chair since 2001 and would not trade it for the world. It would have been a physical disaster to have sat on one of those soft, cushy padded, so called, “executive chairs” for these past years.

3) Sound • can either distract or help you focus: We all respond differently to sound and these differences in our human condition must also be considered when making home office decisions. Do you concentrate better with background music? How will you or your clients respond to a dog barking or children playing in the background? Most are very understanding and even a little jealous of your ability to work from home.

4) Planned Work Hours: The office is where you are. As such, we need to focus and operate in a business-like manner. We have found it best to establish regular business hours. Although you may be just in the next room, your family should know that you are not to be disturbed unless for a very, very good reason.

5) Support needs – outsource or other options: When working at home in the MWE, we often need to proactively identify resources that can help us or fix things. We keep a complete “Help and Fix” list in our computers’ contact lists, by categories, with the phone numbers of all the people and organizations we can go to for help or to fix things. We have a computer “guru” whom we can call and get advice from or who will come to our house and fix our computers or adjust our software. We have a printer repair person who makes house calls in less than two hours.

Our contact list has the telephone numbers of help desks and when we can reach them. It also includes direct dial numbers of people who have helped us in the past with all our software and electronic tools. If you are a corporate worker you would also include the specific telephone numbers and names of people at all the various help desks within your organization.

6) Isolation • Home alone and lonely: One can feel isolated when alone for many hours at day. We make it a point to get out of the home office daily for lunch. Many lunch spots encourage like-minded mobile workers and independents working out of the home to gather. Those who do this say that even though the people they meet have varied jobs it creates improved social conditions and the participants end up becoming pseudo co-workers providing feedback and advice with the added benefit of no office politics.

Additionally, working mostly in a MWE home office may not mean that there is no corporate office. If geographically logical, plan to spend part of your work week in the corporate office. Researchers at IBM learned that if teams went three days without meeting that their productivity “happiness” suffered. Our advice: when logical, spend at least one day out of every week in the corporate office. We also hear from some of our clients that varying the day of the week you go to the corporate facility may have value because different days may offer a different “flavor” of the office.

Welcome to Working in the MWE

Working in the MWE is different from working in the “old” work world.

Common Issues Faced Working in the MWE

Using a PIM

We’re going to use the word “PIM,” which stands for “Personal Information Manager” for the rest of this section fully understanding that there are several brands of these cell phone/email communications devices which are used in the business world.

PIM’s are small, palm-sized, hand-held electronic communications devices which essentially do everything you can do with Outlook or Lotus Notes on your regular computing device, as well as those functions done by the typical cell phone of today.

Please beware that the capabilities of an individual user PIM connected directly to a cellular provider has much different and more limited capabilities than a PIM being operated with the technical program capability available from a large organizational entity.

It is most important that you understand the capabilities of your PIM before spending time trying to do something you can’t do. For example, most organizational supported PIMs allow you to file emails directly into a folder system developed by you or the organization on your corporate computer. Individual PIM user, such as we are, do not have this capability. So again, please seek clarity as to what functions your PIM can and cannot support.

We purposely have avoided a discussion on Texting and Twittering in this paper. We do understand their popularity and do use them for personal communications. Yet, we are not convinced that they are an effective business communications tool except perhaps for the most casual of communication.

Clearly, the current driver for the massive popularity of PIMs in business is the ability to receive and send emails. The “invasiveness” of email has made it necessary for most of us to review how we are using PIMs.

We’d like to offer some “rules of the road” as far as using PIMs:

- 1) Become an expert on using the keyboard of your device.
- 2) Know and master the word typing option available in your device.
- 3) Familiarize yourself with the quick keys and shortcuts available on your device.
- 4) Set your PIM for automatic syncing with your laptop or desktop computer
- 5) Turn off the alarm/alert function of your PIM so you are not notified of every email you receive as you receive it.

- 6) Password protect your PIM in case of loss.
- 7) Identify whether or not the emails you delete on your device will or will not appear on your computer email system.
- 8) Maintain your PIM. Back up the information, periodically empty the cache, speed up processing by deleting the call logs etc. to keep the device running properly.
- 9) Send links with emails whenever you can. Capacity issues of some PIMs may make it hard to read long attachments.
- 10) Have an excellent subject line so that people understand what your email is about even before they open it.
- 11) Decide proactively when you will check voice and email on your PIM and stick to it. Do not let emails control you.
- 12) When processing email/vmail, paperwork, etc. follow the 4D's which are Do it, Designate it, Delegate it, and Discard it! (For more on the 4D's please refer to other PEP writings on our website or contact us directly.)
- 13) Get out of the habit of catching up on email and work after work hours. Turn off your Cell phone/PIM in the evenings and weekends and let others know that you do this. Figure out how to get the work done in the scheduled work hours you plan for it.

Work issues in the MWE

- 1) Client, hotel, or airport: The office is where you are and work is something you do no matter where you are in the MWE. We travel frequently supporting our various associates and clients and have found that effective planning is our key to successfully be able to have everything we need regardless of where we are and what we're doing.

Before any travel, appointment or meeting schedule a time on your electronic calendar to plan, in detail, where you are going and what you will need to successfully carry out your business purpose. Designate time (the second of the 4D's) and Plan It Now! This will assure you the success you need to win in the business world.

- 2) Proper support/equipment needs: Remember the "Help and Fix" contact list we talked about in the section on working at home? We keep this list with us all the time so that we can get in touch with our support network if we should need them.

We also find it best to keep a small amount of business note stationery (yes, paper), company literature, business cards, and postage stamps in our briefcase. You never know when you may want to send a quick, hand-written note or brochure to someone you just met or spoke with. We do think that sometimes in this electronic world we live in that a hand-written note will make a greater impression than an email saying the same thing.

- 3) Getting it all done on time: Those of us who are in the MWE still need to schedule time to be either in the corporate office or home office to do the work which comes from all this traveling. We have learned that every one hour meeting may generate two additional hours of work. Some of this work is preparation for the meeting and the remainder is the actions and tasks which result from a meeting. While traveling we begin to detail our schedules for when we return to our office.

“Plan It Now” assures that you will keep your promises to your clients and associates.

FOLLOW-UP EXERCISES for this white paper

- 1) Identify what type of MWE works for you.
- 2) Establish an effective back-up system to assure against the loss of electronic data. Decide, based upon your new data activity, how often you must update your notebook, what off-line or network storage process you will use, and how often you will back-up. Back-ups, if necessary, should be done no less than once a week.
- 3) If you primarily work at home, plan your office hours and advise family members, friends and associates. Develop a plan how to get your work done in the allocated hours.
- 4) Your Home Office requires an environment where your work can be accomplished in an effective manner. If you are home officing, review your current (both physical and human) situation, the shortcomings in this environment, and the steps to needed to be taken to create a value-added environment to assure productivity.
- 5) Familiarize yourself with the quick keys, shortcuts and functionality of your PIM.
- 6) If you are a mobile worker for a larger company, get into the office, if geographically logical, one day a week on a varying schedule.
- 7) If you are a home worker and you are feeling isolated, consider spending some time at a local lunch spot that caters to mobile workers.
- 8) Last, but certainly not least, turn off your Cellphone/BlackBerry/PIM on Weekends. As the old expression goes - Try it • You'll like it.



Bio of Bary & Lynn Sherman

Bary Sherman is the CEO, and Lynn Sherman is the President of PEP Productivity Solutions, Inc. (PPS) in the United States. The PEP Program is an innovative work-improvement training conducted in twenty-three countries for a broad spectrum of Fortune 500 companies and government agencies.

Bary & Lynn Sherman have participated in the development of several PEP Programs, including Programs focused on the issues of corporate moves, mobile work environment, executive management effectiveness, working in the entrepreneurial environment, and the effective use of Microsoft's Outlook and IBM's Lotus Notes. They have published articles on the subjects of personal effectiveness and office technology.

Most recently, they have introduced an exciting new product called ePEP which is self-paced, highly interactive, stimulating, cost effective e-learning program that will allow everyone to have their own PEP Program from wherever they are, whenever they want.

Over the years Bary & Lynn Sherman have worked with more than a thousand senior executives and staff who have participated in PEP Programs. Their personal clients include companies such as Steelcase Inc., Hewlett Packard, Orange County Transportation Authority, Ernst & Young LLP, Roche, Strategic Decisions Group, Capital Group, and Alcoa.

Bary was raised in Asbury Park, New Jersey, and received his B.Sc. in Business Administration from Monmouth University.

Prior to joining PPS in 1990, Bary was a private entrepreneur and consultant in the field of business start-ups and market development. His early business years were spent in sales and management positions with Sperry Rand Corp. (Unisys). His experiences in the areas of sales, marketing, technology, corporate organization, project planning, and time management made him especially qualified to serve as a consultant to management.

Lynn was raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and received her B.Sc. in Communications from Clarion University and a M.Ed. from the University of Pittsburgh.

Prior to joining PPS in 1996, Lynn first taught high school then moved onto a career as a sales representative for Owens Corning Corp. Continuing in sales & marketing, Lynn moved into the contract furnishings business. She specialized in solution-based design of Next Generation Workspace. Her experience in the areas of education, sales, work space design, project planning and time management made her especially qualified to serve as a consultant to organizations.

They live with their two golden retrievers on a ranch north of San Diego, California. Their home-based virtual office is linked to the world.