



Success Story: Delta Dental of Washington



Interview on the Benefits of Teleworking – October, 2017 with Becky Masters, Director, Compensation, Benefits and HR Technology at Delta Dental of Washington

Company Profile

Founded in 1954, Delta Dental of Washington believes everyone deserves a healthy smile. They fulfill their mission by increasing access to care through employer sponsored dental plans and individual and family coverage. Through education, programming and their Foundation, their aim is to increase access to care for individuals and families across Washington.

Delta Dental of Washington has 410 employees across five locations across the state:

- 200 Employees in South Lake Union
- 5 Employees in Downtown Seattle
- 100 Employees in Colville, WA
- 100 Employees in Spokane, WA
- 5 Employees in Downtown Spokane, WA

Why launch a telework program?

There were numerous reasons including:

- *Happier employees – we do believe that employees who have choices in when and where they work will be happier and more engaged.*
- *Business continuity – since most employees can work from any location – in the event that we might not be able to work from our physical office – our employees can still be productive from any location.*
- *Additional in-office flexibility – this project included changing over all computers from desktops to laptops – having a portable computer assists our employees to be able to move around more in the office – so we can use our office space more collaboratively to work on problem solving as a group.*

How long did it take to roll out?

This project started in Western Washington – the timing worked to finish the rollout a month before headquarters moved from Northgate to South Lake Union. Planning and execution of this project took almost a year.

We are now working on implementing the program at our Eastern Washington facility. It will likely take around nine months. Changing out all the technology equipment is a large part of why it takes longer than if the technology was already in place.

What are the biggest advantages to allowing teleworking?

One of the biggest advantages to employees who telework is not commuting, and being able to focus at home with fewer interruptions.

A great example of business continuity happened last week – the internet in our Seattle office went down. Employees who had not yet started their commute stayed home for the day to work, and employees that were in the office left to work from home. We saved upwards of 1,600 hours of productivity all because employees had the option to work elsewhere versus sitting around the office waiting for the internet to be fixed!

What are the biggest challenges?

We have not set certain mandates at the company level for how often individuals can telework, but rather are leaving that up to individual departments based on business needs. The challenge then is that availability is not “even” across all groups – so there are some employees that become frustrated at times.

Do employees miss having an office? How do you manage that?

We do not have anyone who teleworks 100% of the time – every employee is in the office on average three days per week. Many are still in the office four and five days – but may work from another location on occasion.

We do hear feedback from those that telework more often that they miss the social aspects of being in the office.

You have a set of guiding principles for your program. Do you also have a formalized program with written policies for teleworking?

Yes, we do! Before we started determining all the details, we agreed with our Senior Management Team on five guiding principles. Having this as a foundation has been helpful for both the group rolling out the project and our employees. If any questions or issues come up, we can always go back to our principles to help determine the answer.

Five Principles

- **Balancing** employee flexibility with needs of our clients, our business, and team effectiveness.
- **Trust and personal responsibility** from both managers and employees consistent with trust and personal responsibility to ensure business commitments.
- **Range of options** which may include varied work times, part-time, job-share, telework, etc.
- **Focus on results:** Work is something you do, not a place you go.
- **Collaboration and personal connections** are the core to being One Team; arrangement must ensure connections are not lost.

We also do have a written policy – while we are keeping certain components available for manager and employee adaptation, we have certain rules that are set at the company level.

How do you handle IT needs?

While HR has been the sponsor of this initiative, IT has been our biggest partner. If you don't have the proper tools and support for the technology, the program would not have the same effectiveness.

How do you expect your teleworking program to grow?

For now, we are rolling out the program to the rest of our company. From there, we will evaluate and see how the program will evolve. We may even offer full time telework for certain positions.

What advice can you share with other companies who are considering a teleworking program?

Like any big project or initiative, having Senior Management support is crucial. In addition, you need to be able to properly train each and every manager. Managers play a key role in making the whole program work by properly managing the work and their teams. Managers need to be able to set clear goals and expectations, be able to measure achievement towards those goals and expectations and be able to have difficult conversations when an issue arises.