

# AT&T Management Employees Sound Off On Telework Cuts

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**December 12, 2007** (Network World) News of [AT&T Inc.'s](#) plans to scale back its telework program have set the industry buzzing. Dozens of readers, some who say they are AT&T employees, commented on *Network World's* [recent story](#) about how the telecommunications company is requiring possibly thousands of home-based employees to give up their [virtual](#) offices and return to corporate office sites.

"The old [SBC](#) managers are stuck way back in time! Having been an AT&T employee in a cutting-edge company, we now all feel we have traveled back about 30 years after the SBC acquisition," wrote one reader.

That comment touches on the political situation sources said is the reason the new AT&T is scaling back what once was a celebrated telework program. Prior to being bought by SBC Communications Inc., AT&T reported that 90% of its management employees [telecommuted](#) on a regular basis or occasionally.

But new owner SBC -- which is in the midst of reconciling its own human resources policies with those of former AT&T units BellSouth Corp. and Cingular Wireless LLC -- is not supportive of virtual offices, sources say.

"It's known that SBC people never bought into this," says Chuck Wilsker, president and CEO of the Telework Coalition, an organization in Washington that promotes telework through education and legislative efforts.

Meanwhile, employees are fired up at the thought they may be called back to office sites.

"I'll continue to telework until I am fired. At that point, I am certain I can find a better-paying job with a better corporate culture. Way to go, AT&T -- let's force all of your talent out the door and replace it with contractors," wrote one reader.

Another wrote: "This is the dumbest thing I've heard yet. It's like walking onto a Ford lot, asking the salesman for advice, and finding out he drives a Honda! How can you buy a product from a company that doesn't even use it themselves? (Now to find out if they 'force' me back to the office, if I can write off my gas as a tax expense after being virtual office all this time.)"

Nonemployees similarly questioned the logic of a company retreating from telework when the rest of the world seems to be doing the opposite.

"It's ridiculous that AT&T is regressing back toward the Stone Age. The environmental impact and increased costs to bring workers back into offices should be reason enough to keep teleworking," wrote one reader.

Another commented: "I think Al Gore needs to do a slide presentation for the uppity-ups at the new AT&T. What the world does not now need is 20,000 people commuting because some exec does not feel comfortable with people working from home. Surely AT&T needs to call itself 'green' to survive in today's warming world."

Others pointed out the irony of a telecommunications company that sells services to enable telework, but is cutting back its own employees' telecommuting privileges.

"This direction certainly contradicts the most basic guiding principles of a so-called industry leading telecommunications company. So much for the 'do anything from anywhere' vision," wrote one reader.

Management needs to wake up and see the big picture, another reader suggested. "If they cut off remote workers, they are cutting off their own ability to manage disaster recovery and continue operations in the event of a pandemic situation," the reader wrote. "Not to mention increased productivity and extended core hours of operation will depreciate. ... It's a slap in the face when AT&T is advertising their 'work anywhere programs' to their customers, but refuses to embrace it with their top talented employees."

**Others speculated that AT&T's moves could be intended to force attrition -- some teleworkers might opt to leave AT&T rather than return to an office. "Some might see this as a cheaper way to lay off a bunch of employees as a prelude to outsourcing them," wrote one reader.**

Another questioned: "How do you downsize 10,000 people and not pay them the exit bonus that you assured them you would pay? A) Make them want to leave by implementing policies like this."

Still, not all readers were against the idea.

"I have always questioned how much 'some' people actually do at home. Half the time, these people aren't available via instant messaging or other means -- what are these people doing?" wrote one reader. "I can actually see their point; I believe having contact with your fellow workers brings a lot to the game instead of having everyone isolated in their homes and not knowing what everyone else is doing. Does it have its place? Sure, but as an everyday thing, I'm not so sure."

Another viewed the situation pragmatically: "It sure sounds to me like it's a case of upper-/middle-level managers beefing up their 'dominions' to show how vital and important their roles are in the face of a downsizing. Since the corporate culture apparently gives little or no support to telecommuting, this is a simple and acceptable action toward that goal."

It could simply be a matter of good business, suggested another reader, who said, "If the SBC management is so bad and AT&T and [BellSouth](#) management is so progressive, then why are they the ones who bought the other two companies? ... SBC was the smallest [regional Bell operating company] and has now grown into the largest domestic telecommunications company. Seems to me they must be doing something correctly."

