

## Challenges of Remote and Hybrid Working – The Employer/Employee Perspective

### Description

Did you know that remote work had its beginnings in the 1970s? Jack Nilles was a true rocket scientist in the late 1950s and 1960s and his work was highly classified. In the early 1970s Jack Nilles moved to a position at the University of Southern California where he was allowed to explore his idea that remote work for employees would be good for business and the environment. He actually published the book, *The Telecommunications-Transportation Tradeoff*, that discusses telecommuting and computer technology as a counter measure to rush hour traffic. Nilles, now 87, still works about 40 hours a week. His work has come to the forefront once again with the worldwide pandemic and he has been quoted in several interviews over the last year – after 48 years, I’m an overnight success. •

Nilles’s work explored the same issues that employers and employees have been dealing with over the last year – namely, cost vs. benefit; convenience, work productivity and so on. You can view more of his theories, musings, etc. at his blog: [jalahq.com/blog/category/teleworktelecommuting/](http://jalahq.com/blog/category/teleworktelecommuting/)

Does the title industry work for remote employees telework, telecommuting? There are some positions that were somewhat remote before the pandemic such as account representatives, sales representatives, marketing representatives. Many companies have used remote employees for title commitment and policy production for many years preceding the pandemic. However, this usually involved carrying paper files back and forth from the office to the home-office which was time consuming and led to back pain in some of us. As technology changed, these title production employees were able to get relief from hauling around the paper file/boxes and obtain information via fax machine and email. Then prior to VPN (Virtual Private Network), there were a few options to access work computers and further eliminate faxes and paper files but these options involved a fair amount of time when the internet speeds were still dial-up.

If only Mr. Nilles had the experience of a worldwide pandemic and advanced technology to help advance his theory of 48 years ago! But this brings us to the questions of how does Remote work for the title industry and has it added complications to the employer/employee relationship? Since March 2020, the title industry, as an essential service, has had to adapt to a new way of doing business with clients but also with employees. Remember those early days in 2020 when the world was shut-down but interest rates were rocketing lower and lower? How in the world could the title industry work from home? How could employees be kept safe in the workplace? It seems as though employers and employees worked together like never before in our industry. Employees were thankful to have a position in an industry that was considered essential while many were left without jobs. Employers were thankful (and still are!) to have dedicated employees through an unprecedented world situation.

But now the pandemic is still here over a year later, what is happening in the title industry world? From an employer perspective, fewer employees in the office means less office space is needed and therefore, lower monthly expenses. But an employer also has to continue to monitor workflow of its remote workers in different ways. Is a remote worker more productive than an office worker? Does a

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remote worker have a better attitude than an office worker because of a lack of commute and the ability to work in more casual attire? Is a remote worker more distracted than an office worker? Is that pile of dirty laundry or the dirty dishes in the sink a distraction to the remote worker? I know I have no temptation to clean up the dirty dishes in the office kitchen but seeing them in my own kitchen sink is a different story!

An employer also might want to set remote work requirements for those employees such as specific "office" hours or a more flexible workday schedule with something of a split shift. Remote workers may work earlier in the day and later in the evening in exchange for flexibility in the middle of the day "time for a lunch out of the house, a hair appointment etc. Employers may want to continue standard business hours to meet the client and business needs. Another consideration for an employer is if a remote worker should be compensated the same as an in-office employee? The remote worker has no commute or fuel cost. Is a remote worker more productive than an in-office employee? The connections between employees may not be as strong with a mixed location team. There may not be as much social interaction or face to face time. The lack of quick meetings at the vending machine or the office kitchen or even in the office restroom! These things cannot be discounted as an important part of employee interaction with each other and with the employer/manager.

As you can see, there are many issues, questions and concerns from both sides " employer and employee. As with all relationships, the key may just be communication between employer/manager and employee (whether a remote worker or office worker). Employers/managers must be aware that an employee may have suggestions on how part or all of the job could be done remotely.

Employers/managers should be open to those thoughts and suggestions and work with the employee to see if those ideas can be translated to full time remote work for that position or even a hybrid between remote work and office work. Remote employees need to communicate more frequently with the office staff and the managers, whether this communication is by phone, Facetime, Zoom, Go to Meeting, text and/or email. This keeps the remote employee engaged with the office staff and also helps an employer know that the remote employee is engaged in his/her work and cares about being part of the team.

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**Becky Taylor**  
**CEO and President of Titleworks Inc.**

Becky Taylor began her employment with Titleworks Inc. on May 29, 1995 as a settlement processor and post closer. She quickly moved to take on more administrative responsibilities to become Vice President as well as keep an active role in the settlement process. She assumed the role of owner, CEO and President of Titleworks Inc. in 2006. She is a graduate of Clemson University, proud mother of a Washington & Lee University graduate, Virginia Notary Public, and currently serves as Treasurer for the Virginia Land Title Association. Ms. Taylor has been a licensed title agent since August 25, 1995 and has over thirty (30) years of experience in real estate settlements.

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vltaexaminer

*VLTA Examiner*