

## THE FUTURE OF WORK

MANAGING THE NEW WORKFORCE

### PLAYBOOK: BEST PRACTICES

# HOME, OFFICE, AND LABORATORY

CONSULTANT MARGARET REGAN PUTS THEORY TO WORK WITH A FAIR-FLUNG NETWORK OF OFF-SITE CONSULTANTS AND PART-TIMERS

by: Jena McGregor

**In 2002**, when Margaret Regan's division was spun off from human resources consultancy Towers Perrin, she first considered leasing space in the firm's 29-story Madison Avenue office building in Manhattan. But then she spoke with her clients, who turned to Regan and her team for advice on managing a workforce that she foresees working more and more from home and demanding ever more flexibility. "If you're so smart about the future," they asked her, "why don't you show us how the work will be done?"

So, at the urging of such heavy weight clients as Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, and PepsiCo, Regan founded the FutureWork Institute with an eye to practicing what she preaches. She converted her four-story Victorian-style Brooklyn brownstone into the occasional meeting spot and crash pad for the firm. The rest of the time, her 20 consultants work from home or on the road. By experimenting with organizational structures, pay theories, and benefit models, she is trying out, on a small scale, ways to motivate, manage, and lead tomorrow's workforce. Here are three ways Regan is trying to walk the talk.

### FOSTER FLEXIBILITY

**WHILE MANY** companies allow some form of working from home, Regan takes it to another level. She lives on the second and third floors of her townhouse, while the fourth level has become a meeting space for twice-monthly gatherings. The ground-floor office is used for executive coaching. To accommodate out-of-town employees, she had bookcases and cabinets built that fold out to become beds and desks.

Regan acknowledges that major corporations won't be converting CEOs' homes into headquarters. But they will need to embrace having a large portion of workers offsite. **That's part of the philosophy Regan calls "My Job My Way," in which consultants can ramp up and ramp down work as needed.** Yael Sivi, based in New York, worked from Germany for two months to be close to her fiancé. And California-based Mary Hett, a new mother, sometimes appears at staff meetings via SecondLife, the online virtual world.

### BUILD A JUST-IN-TIME WORKFORCE

**REGAN HAS** a core group of 20 consultants, but she also maintains relationships with 80 diversity experts whom she can call on when needed. Frequently, global companies employ the FutureWork Institute to assess employees' sensitivity to diversity issues. Because such training is sometimes reactive - a response to gender or race-related lawsuit, for example - Regan must be able to marshal trainers quickly from around the globe.

Many industries that rely heavily on contractors or outsourcers already know the value, as well as the difficulties and risks, of using such an elastic workforce. **But Regan believes more and more work will be done through organizations with a core employee group supported by networks of free agents.** "I call it the hyperlinked organization," she says.

### GET PERSONAL WITH PERKS

**RECENTLY, REGAN** has begun giving consultants who have been with her for five years a substantial extra perk of their choosing over and above standard benefits. For one part-time senior consultant, Regan is paying for private Pilates classes and sessions with a personal coach. Two boomer-generation consultants chose to have the firm help fund retirement investments. Sivi just wanted to take a paid sabbatical: "That's been huge for my commitment to the firm," she says.

**Regan foresees a more customized approach to benefits, as different generations clamor for different benefits.** Whether Regan's personalized perks could work in a 100,000-person company is far from clear. "Most companies feel they're already at their absolute limit in terms of (funding benefits)," says Craig Dolezal, a senior consultant at Hewitt Associates. Still, Regan believes the message is valuable: "We're moving into a world where one size does not fit all."