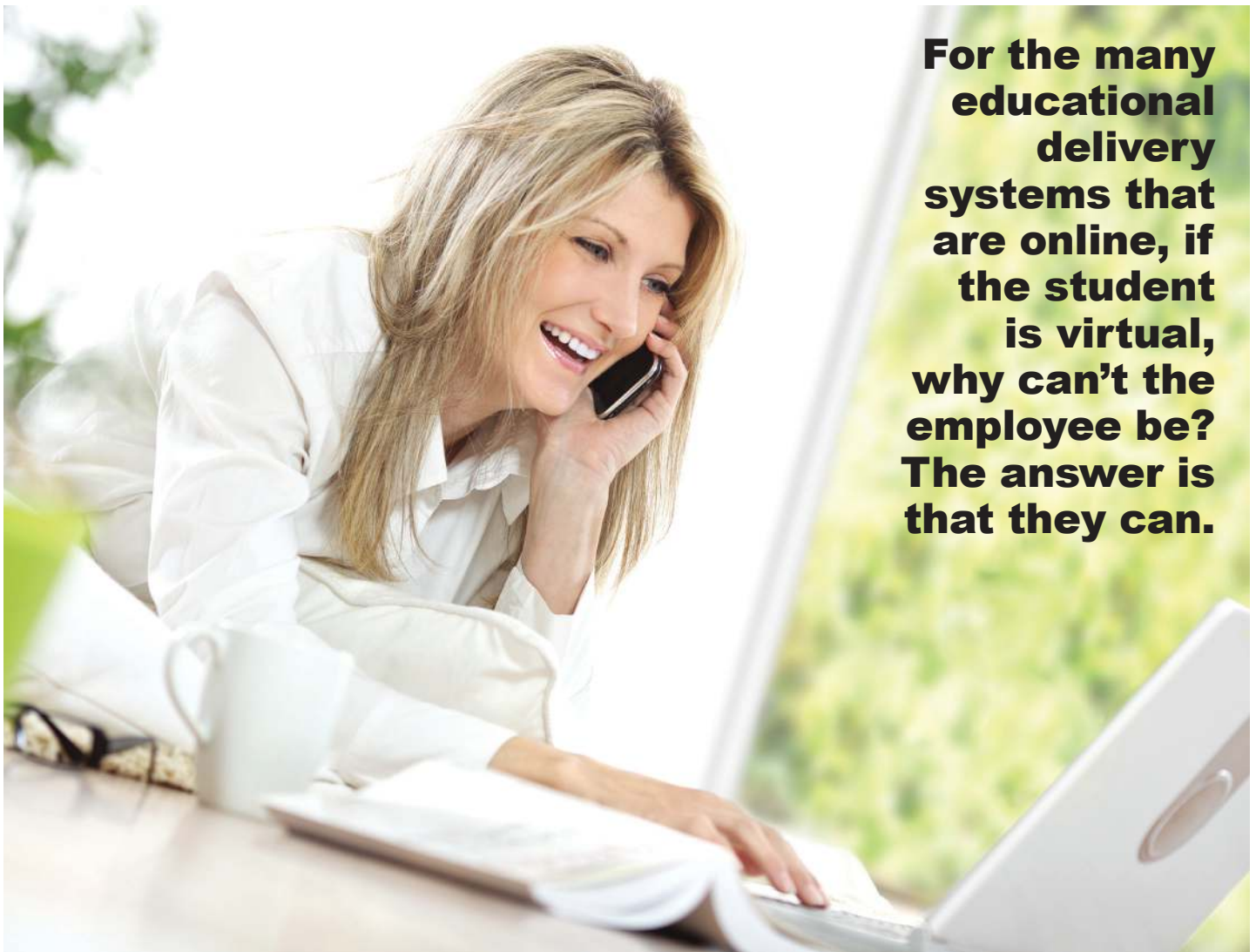




LOCAL OR VIRTUAL

Do your employees need to be in the office to be effective?

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For the many educational delivery systems that are online, if the student is virtual, why can't the employee be? The answer is that they can.

When Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer announced she was cutting the company's telecommuting policy, it caused quite the controversy and discussion. This news was compounded by the announcement of her pregnancy – much to the chagrin of working moms everywhere, not just at Yahoo. If a pregnant, female CEO couldn't be the advocate for more of a work-life balance (often achieved through working virtually), who could be?

This corporate positioning has had ripple effects throughout every industry that employs some type of remote or virtual worker. Her bold decision sparked an even hotter debate concerning which type of employee is more beneficial.

Speaking at the forum for human resources professionals, Mayer reiterated the company line on the telecommuting decision. "It's not what's right for Yahoo right now," she said, according to *Fortune*.

People are more productive when they're alone, she acknowledged, but they're more collaborative and innovative when they're together.

When it comes to the education sector, many organizations utilize virtual employees very successfully. For the many educational delivery systems that are online, if the student is virtual, why can't the employee be? The answer is that they can. I've seen everyone from instructors to deans seamlessly work from home. Often, this increases effectiveness and reduces the associated costs such as real estate, office space, utilities and insurance of in-house employees.

From a talent acquisition and management perspective, virtual employees create huge financial benefits, such as:

- Larger pools of candidates to choose from when hiring, because your searches can be now be regional or national
- Elimination of new hire relocation expenses
- Lower budgeted salary ranges; new hires tend to take lower offers when the expense of commuting to work is eliminated and they are afforded the convenience of working from home

With all of these upsides, it's a wonder we don't have more positions working virtually in education. But the reality is that many organizations like Yahoo still need key individuals at their offices every day so a collaborative synergy can be achieved.

If you are going to allow certain employees to work virtually, I do recommend three key guidelines to ensure success.

1. Assign them project-based work with hard deadlines. Specific tasks with clearly defined goals keeps employees on track. Then you don't have to worry about what time they start or end their day – as long as the project is completed on time
2. Utilize any and all technology. Video chats should be part of your weekly routine with these employees. Make sure your conference room has the right technology so that they can call in and be part of impromptu meetings. Proper Web-based phone systems will allow employees to exist on the same phone system as those in the office. Finally, software should be used to keep everyone's email and calendars on the same page. When used properly, technology can make it feel like your virtual employees are in the office
3. Virtual employees must visit your headquarters at least once a month. It's important to fly them in for key meetings. These employees have to be part of the organizational fabric at all times. Bringing them in often accomplishes that and brings some fresh perspectives and energy into the office. Your in-house employees will also benefit from having their daily routine changed up by the visiting telecommuters. The travel investment is still insignificant compared to the fixed associated costs of in-house employees

Only you know what works best for your organization, but a system incorporating virtual employees is one worth serious consideration for those who hope to compete in the years to come. The increased shortage of qualified candidates combined with the competition for securing them in your organization gives you a decisive talent acquisition advantage if they can work from home.



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