

# *In Defense of Going to Work*

by **Rachel A. Russell**

*Managing Editor*

*American Mineralogist*

*rrussell@minsocam.org*

Office life is changing. Due to rising gas prices, Web-based workflows, authors/editors/reviewers in many time zones, and ‘magical’ software – like Timbuktu<sup>®</sup>, Citrix, and InSites – that is accessible anywhere, telecommuting one day a week (or more) is perfectly possible and productive. I do it too, and I enjoy my weekly (or more if there’s an emergency) telecommuting day. But before we tell our employers we don’t need the office, let’s consider the joys and benefits of working in one.

Driving to work most days, my head is buzzing with many things: What will I do about dinner? Will the laundry get done? Was it a mouse in the basement last night or wild imagination? What should I get my parents for their 50th wedding anniversary? Can I possibly somehow make it to yoga tonight? It is crazy how thoughts can spin and spiral. And then I get to my office and all that disappears. I’m at work. I can set it all aside and focus on what needs to be done today and plan for tomorrow.

The office of my journal, *American Mineralogist*, is located in a quiet campus-like setting – winding walking paths, trees, water fountains, and flowers are always available for a nice break. My office itself is clean and organized – and the trash isn’t my problem, vacuuming isn’t my problem, washing the windows isn’t my problem, and so on. The gardening of those flowers isn’t my problem!

I have computers and software that cost

more than I could afford at home, a computer backup system and computer support, a photocopier/printer/scanner thing, pens, papers, and so on that are bought with office money.

For me, it is an amazing blessing to have an office to go to. Not every day is perfect by any means. But even on the days where the e-mails get wild and the phone rings and the executive director wants to talk and the webmaster has some new directive – the focus is still on work, the goals are still clear and achievable.

Meetings with staff and with those in other departments can be spontaneous and productive at the office. Sometimes a little verbal reminder or question can save many e-mails back and forth. Ideas can blossom from unexpected encounters.

And at the end of the day, I go home with an absolutely clear mind, ready to tackle dinner and maybe even the possible mouse!

There can be problems with going to an office, for example, there can be coworkers with clashing personalities and many interruptions to a train of thought. But working at home doesn’t necessarily mean you won’t hear the construction noise from the new house being built, the shouts of happy children playing after school, the grinding noise of skateboards, or discover you need to give a ride to your 83-year-old neighbor who needs to go to the doctor. (*You* tell her no; I’m not able to!) Telecommuting must be gone into

## Going to Work

*continued*

carefully.

There is much information out there in books and blogs about setting up a home office and effective means of telecommuting. For example, the remote office information in the November/December issue of *EON* was extremely valuable. We took many of those ideas and thought: If that is efficient for remote work, why wouldn't it also be efficient for the office? Now, for example, we have our specific issue production charts in Excel® instead of paper, accessible via any computer, even those at home. It is exciting to improve our routines and to add the flexibility so vitally needed today. These Excel® charts led to a greater appreciation of being able to download reports in Excel® from our Web-based peer review system (AllenTrack, same as eJournalPress). This is improving and simplifying our work – even if we mostly do it at the office instead of remotely.

In these economic times, taking home a paycheck is a great blessing. But I mean something more, an even deeper satisfaction. Work itself – in my case, the satisfaction of helping authors, editors, and reviewers; managing deadlines, resources, and people; concentrating on copyediting or layouts or Photoshop; or all the other myriad tasks – work itself is a satisfying part of my 'life balance'. Freedom to work the hours you want and in settings you want can slowly morph into

working at midnight, on vacation, and so on in a never-ending stream of exhaustion. Freedom can be another word for trying to be everything to everyone, a super-person. Without careful planning, freedom can mean you get the routine (yet obviously still important) chores of an editorial office, instead of the challenges of creating and shaping the direction and workflow of the journal. Freedom can mean missing the brainstorming and other interactions and being stuck with the laundry.

I am very lucky to have an office in a location I like, with colleagues who are pleasant to work with. There are many books and materials about coping with challenging coworkers or bosses; about management; about office organization. I know it is not always easy, there are offices where yelling might be common or other toxic behaviors. But giving up the office entirely, instead of adding flexibility and maturity to it, should be thought about very carefully.

I may very well have more time for my 'other life' because the boundaries are clear. Who knows? Or in a different life stage, I may write another article about 'who needs an office!' Or, when our computers are embedded in our brains, maybe children will not even know what an office is.



## What would you like to tame?

Do you have questions about specific programs, software, or hardware that you would like to see featured in one of these columns in 2011? If so, please contact Lindsey Brounstein, [LBrounstein@gastro.org](mailto:LBrounstein@gastro.org), the Taming Technology section editor and let her know what lions, tigers, and bears are running amok in your world.

