

# Connections

Covering the people side of contact center management



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## Identifying Successful Virtual Workers

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Many types of jobs are well suited for at-home employment, from call center reps to IT personnel to insurance claim reps and underwriters. Early adopters of virtual employment, however, know there are challenges to tackle and best practices to embrace.

### Special Considerations

- *Not every job is suitable for virtual work.* Companies should conduct thorough job analyses to address the needs of the customer, the employer, and the employee.
- *Managers must shift their thinking.* Managers of virtual workers must understand this new supervisory role, respect and trust virtual workers, and provide open communication and feedback. Managers and employees can function more effectively when work guidelines and goals are clearly defined and performance is regularly reviewed.
- *Physical isolation can impact performance.* Virtual workers may be negatively impacted by reduced team interaction. For example, they won't accidentally overhear a coworker's great idea and they'll have fewer informal connections to draw on.
- *Ergonomics and other safety standards.* Many firms conduct on-site evaluations of home-based work areas to ensure utility. For confidentiality and security purposes, some require that the workplace be in a separate area of the home that is not used by others.

### Not everyone is suited for virtual work.

Perhaps the most important consideration is the fact that not everyone can succeed as a virtual worker. It's no longer enough to know whether people can accomplish job responsibilities: now you also need to know who can accomplish their duties from their home with only an electronic tether to the workplace.

## Podcast Explores Virtual Work Arrangements

Listen to an interview with Barbara LoRusso, Ph.D., as she discusses her unique research on virtual workers. You'll gain insights into best practices in virtual work arrangements — as well as pitfalls to avoid. Please visit our web site and click on the first item under "[Announcements](#)."

## Identify and Develop Successful Virtual Workers

The new [Virtual Worker](#) assessment will identify current employees and job candidates who can succeed as remote customer service, sales, claims, underwriting, IT, and operations personnel. Equally important, you will receive the coaching advice and self-development information you need to enhance their performance.

For more information, please visit our [Web site](#) or contact Rhonda Giacomarra (860-298-3951 or [rgiacomarra@limra.com](mailto:rgiacomarra@limra.com)) or Nicole Overmeyer (770-984-6450 or [overmeyern@loma.org](mailto:overmeyern@loma.org)).

## Financial Services Customer Service Conference

LOMA's annual conference for customer service experts at financial services companies will be held March 11–13, 2009, in San Antonio, TX. Covering strategic and operational issues unique to this segment, it will provide you with the opportunity to network with peers and professionals who face — and solve — the same challenges you see every day.

For more information or to register, please visit the [event page](#).

As our clients began ramping up their virtual work programs, we began researching the competencies of people who can succeed in a virtual work environment. We interviewed and surveyed hundreds of virtual workers and their managers to determine what it takes to succeed in this work environment.

We found that the unique blend of skills, abilities, and personal attributes of successful virtual workers were clear:

- **Skills** — Virtual work places a premium on communication and technology skills. Employees must be able to clearly and concisely communicate electronically, quickly learn your systems, and perform basic troubleshooting tasks — training and IT personnel can't spend their days making house calls! Simply put, virtual workers must be computer comfortable.
- **Work preferences** — Minute-to-minute supervision is significantly lower for virtual workers, so these individuals must prefer autonomous work and unstructured environments. Successful virtual workers prefer to take the initiative and would probably chafe under frequent management intervention. These are not people who like to participate in office politics!
- **Personal attributes** — Virtual workers are conscientious people who can focus in the face of distractions. They are people who take ownership of their work: they strive to understand their assignments, know when to ask for guidance, and like conveying their performance and task status to their managers.

Knowing who to place in a virtual work environment takes information. You can start with people who consistently deliver above average performance and have excellent relationships with current and previous supervisors. But to safeguard your investment in equipping and developing virtual workers, you should accurately assess each candidate's virtual worker competencies.

**Barbara LoRusso, Ph.D., directs the Assessment Solutions Group's research program. This program develops and validates selection tools, including interviews, competency models, assessment tests, and call center simulations. Barbara earned her doctorate in Applied Psychology from the University of Georgia.**

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