

NASFAA's "Director Download" – Episode 5 Transcript

- Justin Draeger: Hey everyone, welcome to another edition of "Director Download," I'm Justin Draeger.
- Joelle Fredman: I'm Joelle Fredman with NASFAA's communications team.
- Beth Maglione: I'm Beth Maglione, I'm with NASFAA.
- Jim White: I'm Jim White, from Gonzaga University.
- Justin Draeger: Welcome Jim, we're glad that you could come in for an episode today that I think is going to be epic and really helpful to a lot of our members.
- Justin Draeger: Let me ask you all a question real quick. When you picture telework, all right, in your mind's eye, teleworking, paint me a picture, what do you see? Beth, what do you see?
- Beth Maglione: Jammies.
- Justin Draeger: So it's the ... it's I'm getting up, I'm stumbling over to the computer, I have not showered.
- Beth Maglione: I don't want to say hard work isn't getting done-
- Justin Draeger: Right.
- Beth Maglione: But definitely in a comfortable setting, in your home-
- Justin Draeger: People will work a lot harder and more productively with elastic waistbands than with belts on.
- Beth Maglione: Darn right.
- Justin Draeger: Speaking of myself.
- Beth Maglione: Darn right. Yeah. And if you've got your dog or cat on your lap, so much the better also.
- Jim White: Cat on the keyboard, not on your lap. The cat on the keyboard is typically what happens at our home.
- Justin Draeger: They know where the attention, they want to be where the hands are at. Yes. All right, Joelle, how about you?
- Joelle Fredman: My kitchen and living room is just covered in papers.

Justin Draeger: Ah.

Joelle Fredman: Like just tornado taken over.

Justin Draeger: So, and Joelle, we should point on, you do telework occasionally.

Joelle Fredman: Yeah, I work from home on Fridays.

Justin Draeger: And so-

Joelle Fredman: Ironically we are recording on a Friday.

Justin Draeger: Right.

Joelle Fredman: And I am here. But I do come in when needed.

Beth Maglione: She is wearing jammies for those of you-

Justin Draeger: Yeah, and she, yeah.

Joelle Fredman: I'm wearing my jeans today.

Justin Draeger: And Jim, how about you? What do you picture teleworking?

Jim White: Well, a big cup of coffee.

Justin Draeger: Yes.

Jim White: Laptop on a coffee table. And I said the cats, beating them away because you're trying to get some work done. That's what I picture.

Justin Draeger: And who's happier? Is it the cat or the human in that scenario?

Jim White: A little bit of both.

Justin Draeger: Yeah.

Jim White: Cats are getting a little bit of love, and the human's getting a little bit of productive stuff done too.

Justin Draeger: So Joelle, you're a part time teleworker, Jim, do you telework at all?

Jim White: I may every so often telework when I have something that just ... I just need to spend some time wrapping my head around something, I'll take it home. Or if I'm having some work done at home-

Justin Draeger: Yeah.

Jim White: I'll do a little teleworking from home at that point. But my staff does more than I do.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. And I sort of feel like anybody who's a director, or overseeing large functionality, when you go to conferences you might be teleworking. Like teleworking isn't always strictly defined as working from home-

Jim White: Correct.

Justin Draeger: It could be working while on the road. So ...

Jim White: When I was a young director and was often overwhelmed, I would telework by just picking up all the stuff I had to read, and going to the library on campus because I felt like if I was somewhere where people couldn't find me, I'd actually get through the pile, and make headway.

Justin Draeger: Yes. I telework from one block from here all the time. There's a basement where there's a waterfall that's very peaceful, and I get a lot of work done there, so-

Beth Maglione: It's your reading nook.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, it's my reading nook, that's right. There's also a food court down there, so as you can imagine, it's like just gorging and working, so it's wonderful.

Justin Draeger: Beth, you don't telework very often, occasionally, but you oversee people who regularly telework, or have regular intermittent teleworking schedules.

Beth Maglione: That's right. I think I have one full-time teleworker, and then folks like Joelle who do part time telework. I don't usually. This is because my house is chaotic. I've mentioned before that I have two little people, two children under the age of four, and they're there, so no work shall be done on their watch.

Justin Draeger: Right.

Beth Maglione: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: So it's got to ... we're sort of hitting on a dynamic that we'll talk about today, which is teleworking brings, conjures a lot of different images for people. For some people it's very productive, other people imagine it's people ... like an excuse to sluff off. So we want to conquer some of the myths and reality here.

Justin Draeger: The other thing is getting at circumstances, so is it the right personality for teleworking? Is it the right job function for teleworking? So we'll talk about all of that.

Justin Draeger: Leading into this conversation, we also spoke to an expert on this, her name is Brie Reynolds. She's a career specialist at Flex Jobs, and let's hear what Brie has to say.

Brie Reynolds: Hi, this is Brie.

Justin Draeger: Hey Brie, this is Justin Draeger, thanks for joining us. Your background is in human resources and career advising, and people may have seen you in outlets like Fast Company, or Forbes, and NBC News. You're currently blogging for FlexJobs.com, and you talk a lot about teleworking, which is something we hope to tap your expertise on today. So thanks for joining us.

Brie Reynolds: Sure, thanks for having me.

Justin Draeger: I think for a lot of people, they understand why flex work, or teleworking, is good for employees. And sometimes I even feel like it's romanticized quite a bit. I wonder if you could first just talk about how you define flex job, or flex working, and teleworking, and then maybe we can talk about the downsides that people don't think about.

Brie Reynolds: Sure. So yeah, flex working, teleworking, there's so many different phrases that kind of get tossed around. But essentially there's a bunch of different types of flexibility that organizations look at when they're trying to build a flexible work program, or just offer it casually to their employees. Teleworking, or remote work, or telecommuting, those all refer to essentially the same thing, which is allowing employees to work from home. And that could be either part time or all of the time, so you might have people who work from home one or two days a week, or people who work from home completely, five days a week. And we also see situations where people work mostly from home, but then come into the office for meetings, or client presentations, or things like that.

Brie Reynolds: So there's a lot of different ways that organizations put together their telework, or remote work programs that really cater both to the employees and the organization, so that they can kind of get those benefits, and also reduce some of the challenges that they might face.

Justin Draeger: For a lot of people I think obvious, you know, it's sort of like you can maybe achieve more work life balance, you don't have to spend time commuting when you could just be working, or taking care of personal things that we all have to deal with in life. But are there some downsides associated with teleworking, telecommuting as well?

Brie Reynolds: There definitely can be. For people who are doing the actual teleworking, you experience feelings of isolation, or loneliness because you're actually working alone most of the time, if you do work from home a lot. There is also a lot of distraction when you work from home. All of the sudden, that laundry pile that's

been sitting there for a while seems very intriguing when you want to kind of avoid a project that you really don't want to do.

Brie Reynolds: And so it's really important for people to be able to spot those areas where they may need to pay extra attention, and really allow themselves to focus, set themselves up for success, having a dedicated space that they're going to work in, and really having some things in place that remind them that they're working when they're working from home.

Brie Reynolds: And then of course from the employer's perspective, some of the challenges are really communicating with remote workers. You have to make a very concerted effort, and a proactive effort to be communicative with the people who are working from home. So as a manager, you can't just rely on seeing somebody in the office in order to know that they're working, you have to really reach out to them and say, "Hey, what are you working on today? What are your challenges, how can I help?" And just really keep a regular communication going between yourself and the remote worker in order to make sure that they are staying on top of things.

Brie Reynolds: When you're managing a remote work force, if you have good communication standards and practices in place, you're going to have an excellent remote team. And if you have poor communication in place, you're going to find remote work doesn't work for you. So that's really kind of the key thing.

Justin Draeger: I think that's right, and here at NASFAA we have about our third of our staff that are teleworking full time, and then we have some folks that are teleworking part time, which is I think becoming more common, but that investment in technology, I think, can't be overemphasized. And you talk about this in some of your writings, but what are some of the practices you've seen in terms of the best way to stay in communication with your remote or teleworking staff?

Brie Reynolds: I think definitely investing in technology is a really good idea, and it can be very simple, basic sorts of technology, it doesn't have to be anything too fancy, but allowing people to have a comfortable office set up with monitors, laptop, wireless keyboard, that kind of thing, but also a nice headset, so when they're having phone calls with their employees it's a really high quality connection.

Brie Reynolds: And also programs, software programs like Slack or other instant messenger type programs where you can communicate over chat pretty easily, those are very helpful as well. And then project management software if you have teams that are working together on projects that aren't physically together to be able to meet, it's really nice to have some kind of project management software. And again, there's so many different versions, there's free versions, and pay for versions, and to fit your budget you can really find something. And those really help to keep everybody on the same page.

Brie Reynolds: And then just regular phone calls, and emails, and regularly checking in just like you would with somebody who might be working in the office, but at a different location than you. You know, just keeping in mind that those basics are really important too.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, and kind of going along with all technology, you can invest in technology, you can have really easy ways to communicate with people, but there's a certain amount of discipline, or maybe change you have to implement. I've found, with our teleworkers, it takes an effort to say, "No, we are ... we could just have a phone call, or we could just email, or Slack, or instant message, but we are going to make a concerted effort to regularly have video chats, because there's something about being able to read somebody's body language, or to be able to see their face, to be able to make that sort of human connection, which as you pointed out, with today's technology, it's almost integrated into all sorts of different services that we're probably already using.

Brie Reynolds: Video chat really helps to bridge that gap of that body language, that human connection that we're kind of missing when we're on the phone, or using email. And to do that regularly is really important, and I'm the kind of person who when I hear video chat, I cringe. But once I do it, and then it's over, I'm really glad that it happened. So we do that usually about once a month, or a couple times a month on the content team that I'm on at Flex Jobs. And it's really nice to see people, but boy, leading up to that video chat, I'm thinking, "Oh geez, I have to do another video chat."

Brie Reynolds: But once it's over, it feels so good. You remember what people look like, and what they look like when they smile, and it's just a nice, human connection that you don't get otherwise.

Justin Draeger: Couldn't agree more.

Brie Reynolds: So yeah, I'm a reluctant advocate of video chat.

Justin Draeger: All right, so I sort of feel like some industries, jobs, companies might lend themselves more to teleworking, flexible work, than others. Higher education, they're very innovative when it comes to like educational outcomes, and innovative learning models. So there's a lot of innovation happening in our industry, but when it comes to things like teleworking, I feel like higher education might be a little bit behind other industries. And I'm wondering if you've seen other industries that are slow to adapt, and what they did to sort of bring themselves up to par. And particularly with our audience, which is primarily financial aid folks, how do you get there?

Brie Reynolds: Higher ed isn't the only industry that is ... maybe is a little slower to pick up these things. And really, even when you look inter-departmentally in higher ed, I actually come from a higher ed background, I worked at a college for about five years, and understand that traditional approach to work that most of the offices

have. But when you look at it department by department, you'll see a lot of variation. So for departments that are less student focused, you might have more people teleworking. When you look at faculty and things like that, there are so many virtual classes now, there's whole colleges that are run completely online, and programs that you can earn your degree online and all that sort of stuff.

Brie Reynolds: So there are some parts of higher ed that are already doing this really well, and taking advantage of the latest technology, and almost are at the cutting edge of telework. And then for other departments who are trying to take steps towards that, but don't necessarily want to make the huge leap into full on teleworking, I think it's important to talk to the other departments that you have access to, and sort of ask them how did they get into this, what types of technology do they use? Also talking to the IT department, or the help desk about what they need to have in place for people, especially in financial services where's so much sensitive information being passed. What they need to have in place to have people work from home securely, and setting that up.

Brie Reynolds: And I've seen industries that are a little bit slower to adapt to this, what I really recommend is trial and error. So not having a whole department, or a whole college go virtual all at once, but have select team members who are willing to participate in some kind of trial, where they work from home a little bit, they work out the kinks and sort of get used to it and see what works and what doesn't before you put it out department wide. I think that can help. And that can also bring reluctant managers and higher ups into the equation. Say, "Hey, we did this little trial, and here's how it worked. Here are the benefits, the challenges, here's what we're doing to work on the challenges," and really just having kind of a case study that you can show them I think helps too. Because you really, you have to get buy in from a lot of different people in order to make it work.

Justin Draeger: That's really helpful, and even when it comes to meeting with students a lot of times today with what we would traditionally think of like our traditional younger students, they might prefer virtual meetings as opposed to always coming into the office. Now of course, you'll always have some student traffic, but even when it comes to like those face to face or traditionally face to face meetings, there might be other ways to even experiment with those, with your students.

Brie Reynolds: Absolutely, yeah. I think like you said, meeting the students where they are and for offering a variety of different ways for them to communicate with you, and with the people in your office is so helpful. And I think a really good model for this is alumni services. They often are communicating with alumni who are in a different state, or a different country, and they make it work. They have lots of different ways that they put into practice to communicate with those folks, and so having that connection and maybe talking to people who work in alumni relations about what they do to actually communicate with the alumni would probably be pretty helpful.

Brie Reynolds: But students today, I mean they're so used to communicating that way. Not necessarily being face to face, and it could be phone calls, it could be video chat. All sorts of different ways to get in touch with them and help them out that aren't necessarily them coming into the office.

Brie Reynolds: And like you said, there's still going to be student traffic, there are definitely students who want to come in and get that face time with staff, and so having a hybrid situation where you have some people in the office and some people working from home can work, or have individuals be able to work sometimes in the office and sometimes from home. There's so many different ways you can organize it.

Justin Draeger: So for those who are interested in learning more about teleworking, some of the best practices, things to consider, they can find you blogging regularly on FlexJobs.com. They can also follow you on Twitter @BrieReynolds, and we'll make sure we have your handle and links to some of your stuff in our show notes.

Brie Reynolds: Thank you so much for having me.

Justin Draeger: Oh, we're so glad to have you, and thanks for very much for your time.

Justin Draeger: All right, so let's talk a little bit about some of the things we talked about with Brie. And Jim, I'm interested specifically on campus, I feel like it's pretty clear what the upsides are to individuals. I mean, just cutting out the commute alone to me is ... if I added up the amount of time I commute every day, and then I added that up cumulatively throughout the year, it would be a depressingly ...

Beth Maglione: Don't do that math.

Justin Draeger: Like terrible number. Yes, it's sad.

Beth Maglione: You'll want to curl into a ball and cry.

Justin Draeger: It's not good, right.

Beth Maglione: Right.

Justin Draeger: So just that. But from an employer standpoint, so you oversee an office, you have people that regularly telework. Upsides for your office?

Jim White: Correct.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, what about it.

Jim White: So about four out of eight of the counselors telework, and there is no traffic in Spokane, so you can't do that argument of adding up the time, because most people can get there in 15 minutes.

Jim White: Some of the schedules that were established for folks to work flexibly are around daycare needs or demands, not wanting their kids to be in a formal daycare setting, and maybe co-daycaring with a spouse so that's a way that they can do ... kind of manage that. We have an employee in a graduate program that has a clinical component to it, and she needs the time during the workday. So she works really early, many days, she works later in the day, and then she's ... on certain days she's there the entire day.

Jim White: So we kind of have done things around what peoples' individual needs are related to either their family situation, or their schooling.

Justin Draeger: So for you, you see this as you're meeting employees' needs, and hopefully then keeping really qualified staff. Like you don't want to lose these folks.

Jim White: Correct.

Justin Draeger: You want to try to meet them where they are, if possible.

Jim White: Correct.

Justin Draeger: And you've been doing this for a while, so it's working?

Jim White: I'd say we've been doing it for about four and a half, five years.

Justin Draeger: Yeah.

Jim White: Yeah, it is working. There are challenges, because everybody would like a flexible schedule, and the challenge with that is that we are a customer service unit.

Justin Draeger: Right.

Jim White: So we need to be available during the office hours of 8:00 to 5:00 for our people who might walk in or call.

Justin Draeger: Yeah.

Jim White: And we ... to enable us to be able to do flexible schedules for the counselors, we moved to what we call a counselor of the day model. So where counselors have shifts throughout the week and then the days they can flex are the days they're not on their shift, they don't have a shift.

Justin Draeger: Okay.

Jim White: And that way, we make sure there's coverage the entire time we're open for both phone calls and walk in traffic. And then what they can do when they're not on, or they're flexing, is projects, things that they need to do related to their program responsibilities. You can reconcile Pell in an evening without a problem, especially if you have no interruptions.

Justin Draeger: Right. Maybe even better.

Jim White: So those types of things. Yeah.

Justin Draeger: Yeah.

Jim White: Yeah. And those types of things are what's done more in the flexible hours.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. Meeting like your customer's needs-

Jim White: Right.

Justin Draeger: Or in this case your students' needs has to be priority one.

Jim White: Right.

Justin Draeger: But if you're able to still do that within a flexible schedule, it works, so ...

Jim White: Yeah, and there are a lot of things that you need ... there are a lot of things that can be done in that time, off hours, where you have a list of 100 students to work through, a verification list, or some other list. And so people can be pretty productive at those points in the day. And it helps for them not to have the distractions of phone calls.

Justin Draeger: Beth, as you've been managing teleworkers, any ... let's stick with the upsides first.

Beth Maglione: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: Upsides that you see.

Beth Maglione: Yeah, so my employees report to me that they're able to be more productive on those days that they work from home, on exactly what you're talking about, these very thinking intensive projects, editing, anything that requires you to really dig into something and concentrate. On a prior podcast we talked about attention management, and like it can be very challenging in an office, especially a busy office like a financial aid office with students in and out, and lots of commotion, I think that they can really dig into things in a quieter home setting. And so that's the benefit I've heard cited most often.

Justin Draeger: Personally speaking for NASFAA and the personal benefit, some folks might know that I was a ... I occasionally work from home type person, this was when I started at NASFAA back in 2006. By 2008 my father-in-law was diagnosed with cancer, and we were here in DC, we're all ... my family, [Deann 00:19:31] are from Ohio, Michigan. But we were faced with a real stark decision about how we take care of family. And I had approached NASFAA and asked whether in that position I was in at the time, which was a reporter, editor, communications position, whether I could relocate back to Michigan for this. NASFAA was very gracious about it, I feel like they were very forward thinking. And they were very willing to work with me, and in fact I went to a full time teleworking position and it lasted all the way through my father-in-law's illness. And it worked for that position, but this really hits home for me because I was able to work out of a flexible work arrangement that allowed me to stay at NASFAA, which I think also benefited NASFAA in the long term. But also met a very acute need for me.

Justin Draeger: I learned a ton about teleworking, and some of the strengths and weaknesses and real, legit challenges that I think people often don't think about when they think teleworking. Like it's all roses, I think, when you're thinking about it, but there are some real challenges to it, and I'm wondering, Jim, from your standpoint, we can talk about a little bit later like how you overcame them, but what do you think people might not ... like what are the real challenges here that people not be thinking about as they go into teleworking or flex job schedules?

Jim White: Well, one of the challenges is the distractions they get at home. So being focused and being able to get things done. Being clear in terms of what they're trying to accomplish in a given day, so that they are planning for the time when they're home, saving things for that time.

Jim White: I worry a little bit about boundaries with flexible schedules, because someone could really easily wind up working more than they should rather than less. And they need to ... a benefit of working at home is if you needed to take a two hour break in the middle of the day, that's great, and then make that up later on in the day. But I worry that two hours becomes three hours, or four hours, and they're overworking rather than working the standard work hour.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, I want to offer a here, here to that. As someone who was a full time teleworker, when you knock down the separation between office and home, it can become a really unhealthy thing.

Jim White: Right.

Justin Draeger: Because when you sit down at the same terminal you might have used to ... I don't know, shop on Amazon, or do Facebook, you automatically see your email, you start responding to emails, next thing you know, you're not separating work and home at all.

Jim White: Right.

Justin Draeger: It becomes all work.

Justin Draeger: On the other hand, there are probably some folks that aren't well suited, and I'm not asking for names or ... but there are some folks that just, for whatever reason, might not be most productive. I don't want to put you on the spot here, but you've talked about before how like, for you, you prefer being in an office.

Beth Maglione: Oh yeah, well besides the general chaos of my house, I really do. I think ... I'm not going to say that I wouldn't want to maybe work from, let me just reserve that right, right now, to one day request a work from home day.

Justin Draeger: I've got [crosstalk 00:22:31], never work from home, denied, yes.

Beth Maglione: Let me just say that that could one day come, but I don't see it in the near future, really, because for me I do like the interaction, I like the separation very much. We have all worked together on our management team, and even on the other teams that I direct, long enough and well enough, for a period of time, that I think everybody knows when I can be ... like if you need to text me after hours, if there's something going on, that's welcome. If I need to be Slack after hours, that's also welcome. But I may not be just readily available in the evenings when I'm at my home, and that's intentional, you know. That's part of my work/life balance and I like the separation, so for me that's what works, but-

Jim White: Well I also think if you're working at home all the time, you're isolated. You know, you're not getting the stimulation from other peoples' ideas, and you can feel lonely. So I think there's ... it's hard, I've talked to a lot of people who have made that transition to a home office permanently, and it's hard for them to stay connected with colleagues, and outside of their work, because they feel isolated, so that's just one thing you'd have to work on if you were going to be doing it all of the time.

Beth Maglione: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, I want to give a plus one on that one. Having teleworked full time, I found it isolating. And so I had to ... you have to like force yourself out into socialization, so while I absolutely stayed in my pajamas a lot of mornings, there were times where it was like ... I'm not a person who ascribes, for some people I know, like on our own staff at NASFAA, they get up, they shower, they prepare themselves as if they're going into the office to go into their office space in their home, that wasn't me.

Justin Draeger: That said, like I remember after a couple months of doing this, being like, "I need to be out in like civilization sometimes, I need to schedule things with people in the area," because it can feel very isolating.

Jim White: And I think that's a problem in financial aid. The financial aid offices that don't take advantage of professional development opportunities, and go to state or regional conferences. Again, that's isolating. And those offices tend to be more prone to petrify around certain issues, and not get the latest. So you just have to kind of balance that.

Justin Draeger: We do have a TRA, our Training and Regulatory Affairs Department, where it's full time teleworking right off the bat. In fact, a lot of that team does telework. They do some interesting things that we've tried to adopt organization wide, that does require some adjustment on behalf of the employer to make this work. One of them being whenever possible, try to do a video chat as opposed to a phone call.

Justin Draeger: So we use Slack, which is similar, it's an instant messaging tool.

Jim White: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: I mean, frankly, when I'm using Slack, I don't know even if the people I'm Slacking with are like here or somewhere else. I mean, like-

Jim White: Yeah. That's the beauty of it.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, it's so seamless. But the other thing that's built in to Slack, and same with Skype, is you can just as easily do a video chat. And what I like about that is one, I don't have to look up anybody's number, and two, what I like about it, is it's still the face to face, which I feel like it's too easy, particularly in conflict, to hide behind words, and emails, than it is to like look at somebody in the face and be like, "Okay, we're having a challenge, let's work through it."

Jim White: Yes.

Justin Draeger: And sometimes you've got to have the face to face.

Jim White: Right.

Joelle Fredman: Do you warn people before you video them?

Justin Draeger: I know, because at home just might not-

Joelle Fredman: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: People that I interact with regularly I think know that like I will video chat at any time, and if they don't pick up, they usually pick up on the second one because they're scrambling to do something. Something behind the scenes, I don't know what it is.

Justin Draeger: Are there any other challenges that you guys have?

Jim White: One other challenge is there are points in the year where we have to have all hands on deck, and it's usually about August 15th through the middle to the end of September. And it's hard to remember that, like this year we kind of didn't really make the adjustment, and then we ran into some service issues because there weren't enough people in the office at peak times. So we're going to be ... we also just moved into one office, financial aid and student accounts, so we're all together in one space. And we need to be there to support the student accounts team, and they're the ones that really get hammered at the beginning of the year more than the financial aid team, because our work is hopefully largely done.

Jim White: But so we've got to work stuff like that out, and going into spring semester we're going to be just very cognizant of mid-December, well and probably January 1, through the end of January, all hands on deck, no flexible schedules, everyone's going to do more of a standard 8:00 to 5:00 or 7:30 to 4:30, whatever the established schedule for them really is.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, so this starts to get at another point about this, which is this ... you guys view this then as a benefit.

Jim White: Right.

Justin Draeger: It's a benefit.

Jim White: Right.

Justin Draeger: It's not an entitlement.

Jim White: Correct.

Justin Draeger: It can be revoked-

Jim White: Correct.

Justin Draeger: If it needs to be, but you want to try to offer the benefit, and that's important because there are times that you just can't offer that benefit.

Jim White: And when we started out we always do it for like a four month, or a three month time period, let's do it and see how it works out, and make sure that it's meeting all of our needs, and then tweak it if we need to as we go forward.

Justin Draeger: So let's talk about trends real quick. Beth, you have some stats here. Trends in the United States, you would think in 2018 teleworking would be on the rise, am I correct, or what do we got?

Beth Maglione: Yeah, it's kind of interesting, the data's a little bit mixed about that, because there have been some pretty high profile examples of it being revoked, like they

had these ... they had rolled out these big telework policies, and Yahoo revoked it, Bank of America, IBM, Aetna. I think probably in those cases, they might have leaped before they thought it all the way through, and I think there's some lessons to be learned there about how to have functioning teams that still telework.

- Beth Maglione: The data's real clear that those who telework really think it's a great productivity benefit, 91% of people who work from home feel they're more productive than when they're in the office, but there's some questions about self-reported data. It's interesting that there's this large push, on one hand, to make these flex schedules available, and then companies that are floundering. I mean, it seems to be really mixed.
- Justin Draeger: So the US Department of Education specifically Federal Student Aid also just recalled their teleworking force. Now they're limiting them to, I think it's one day a week teleworking, where it was much more ... yeah, and now here's where you get at was the teleworking not working, or as some folks have suggested, is this a way to sort of thin the federal workforce because people will be pushed out?
- Justin Draeger: I can't assign the motivations, but I can say that yeah, on the one hand I think it's expanding, on the other, we are seeing this sort of curtailing. What's your sense on financial aid offices, Jim? Do you think ... is it growing, is it stagnant, where are we at in trends?
- Jim White: My sense is it's more unusual to see flexible schedules, or working at home, or working at a distance in a financial aid office. Not entirely, but I don't see it as prevalent as I think we've seen in other industries and other ... I'm coming from Microsoft, who are Microsoft is, they're big about telecommuting, Nintendo's in the northwest, all those companies, big telecommuting. So it's kind of a northwest type of thing.
- Justin Draeger: You're in a tech hub.
- Jim White: Yeah. But I don't know that a lot of schools do it. I know of one school that has a technology person who works in a different state. And she does a great job.
- Justin Draeger: Yeah.
- Jim White: I know that it's harder in some schools because of things like unions, or state rules or requirements that might limit the ability to be flexible. I think it's easier for us, because we're a private institution and have a little bit of flexibility.
- Justin Draeger: So there's two challenges that I see in the financial aid office that might prevent this. The first is, let's talk about technology. Because we talked about like the seamless communications, but there's a security/technology issue that is very real in a financial aid office. You're dealing with personally identifiable

information, we all know this has to be locked down, data breaches are something that the feds are paying very close attention to. How do you guys overcome those issues?

Jim White: Well our administrative computing system and our document imaging system went to the cloud this summer. And for people to access it, they're accessing the cloud using a two factor authentication at home. So they either get a message pushed out to their cellphone that they have to accept, or they receive a code that they have to plug in. And that's to VPN into the database.

Justin Draeger: So you guys are basically creating a channel that is completely private, secured, that they can't get into without not just a password, but some other identifiable code-

Jim White: Correct.

Justin Draeger: And then they have to work within that channel, and I assume there are strict rules about saving anything locally or ...

Jim White: Yeah, we have protocols, you can't save anything to your drive on your computer, everything should be saved. If there is something saved to the shared drive, we try not to save a lot of student specific data. What we would do, rather, is scan it into the student's file and store it there, if it's student specific. So nothing ... there might be a report, all of our reports we run without Social Security numbers in them, it just has the student ID number though, and that could be perceived as somewhat confidential. So something like that would be stored on the secure drive, the university's secured drive.

Jim White: We don't bring a lot of laptops back and forth. Most people either have a computer that the university has purchased, and at home for them, or they're using their personal one with the VPN software to get into the system.

Justin Draeger: Right. And I know probably not so much anymore today, but when cloud computing was just starting to come into its own, a lot of people were more concerned that this was a less secure, but actually being out on the cloud ensures that when you lose a laptop, or somebody walks in and steals a laptop, which happened at a NASFAA office, we don't have student data, obviously here, but somebody literally walked into our office, took a laptop and walked out, this was at our old building. But something like that happens, you have a data breach.

Jim White: Right.

Justin Draeger: In the cloud everything is secure, you can only get in there through a secure way, it's actually more secure.

Jim White: Well, and it also is backed up, it's redundant. So that was a big plus. We have a much better backup if something should fail.

Jim White: The other thing we do is make sure that if anybody's using their personal email and their cellphone, our policy is they have to have a password on their cellphone because you just don't know what someone's going to send you. You might get a tax return sent to you.

Justin Draeger: Right.

Jim White: It's unfortunate. We have a secure way for families to provide that type of information, but many of them just attach.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, of course. Right. And this was the big hubbub, in fact, this ... a year ago at the department-

Jim White: Right.

Justin Draeger: Where they were like, if somebody sends you a tax return even if you didn't ask for it or solicit it, that's a data breach. It's sort of like, we can't control the people, it's just like mailing you, you can't control what you receive.

Jim White: Right, right.

Justin Draeger: All right. The second big thing ... so if you're willing to make the investment, investments which you should probably be making anyway, the security issue can be dealt with.

Jim White: Correct.

Justin Draeger: The second issue which it might be cultural. And in higher ed, I've always found it really interesting that in higher ed, we can be moving 100 miles per hour down the road of like innovative learning models, and innovated teaching, and figuring out methods to make information stick, and get students to be thinking critically, while at the same time higher ed is sort of not known for maybe innovative stuff in other ways. And teleworking might be one of those things where culturally it's just taken a little while to catch up in higher ed. Is that your experience, or are you going to take me to task and correct me on this?

Jim White: Well, no, I think it's also a generational thing. Most of the financial aid offices are being run by people in my generation, and this is a foreign concept to someone my age.

Justin Draeger: You're what, you're a Gen X? Gen Y, or ...

Jim White: The Gen Y, tail end of the Baby Boomers.

Justin Draeger: Okay, Boomer, yes.

Jim White: That's what I am.

Justin Draeger: Boomer.

Jim White: And I think the millennials, you know, the younger folks, they want more flexibility, they want to be able to be more creative in terms of their scheduling and have that flexibility.

Justin Draeger: What do you think is so challenging for maybe our more seasoned aid directors to wrap their minds around when it comes to teleworking? What is the impediment of the challenge there?

Jim White: A lot of people when they started, there were a lot of very formal work rules. So if your day started at 8:00, you were expected to be there at 8:00, not at 7:55, not at 8:05, but 8:00 on the nose, and you were to work right til 5:00. So changing your schedule, you're kind of violating the principle that you might have been hardwired to. And there's also the notion of I think people who may not be really good planners, or very proactive, they want someone there when they want them. And I find I have that challenge sometimes, where it's like dang, I wish so and so was here, because I like just going to them and getting what I need.

Jim White: I was talking to a colleague yesterday about their boss, and this seems to be trustees meetings of all the Jesuit schools this week, and we had a Jesuit meeting here, and so one person's boss was sending her lots of messages and needed a lot of information, and I don't get that during the trustees meeting, I get that ahead of time.

Justin Draeger: Right.

Jim White: Because my bosses, I think, plan for what's coming. But I think this particular person's boss is more reactionary, and just kind of ... it's a different way to work.

Justin Draeger: Yeah.

Jim White: That would be hard.

Beth Maglione: What you're getting at, Jim, I think is something I've felt and observed in other managers, and it's just maybe a resistance to changing your own way of work as a manager, right-

Jim White: Correct.

Beth Maglione: To meet the needs of your staff. I've heard it positioned as I worry that my staff member might not be able to accomplish x, y, and z from home or be as

productive. And I think sometimes that can be used as an excuse, perhaps, because if your employee is in danger of underperforming, that's a whole separate issue, right, that should be addressed as such.

Jim White: And we wouldn't let them-

Beth Maglione: Right.

Jim White: Work flexible schedules or work from home.

Beth Maglione: Right.

Jim White: If there was a performance issue.

Justin Draeger: So this is another management aspect, though, from a director standpoint, which is it feels at least easier to manage people you can see. I can see that they're working. I can see stacks of files moving, I can see a queue that's being worked done. But it's more difficult when you can't see them, and you have to manage be results. And you do have to sometimes come up with different benchmarks.

Justin Draeger: One of those benchmarks, and now I'm going to speak from the employee side because if somebody's listening and they want to do more teleworking, I do think, and I've given this advice to everyone, when I first started teleworking, I had a boss change right as I was transitioning into that. And the boss that I had was skeptical, very skeptical of teleworking, but my ship had sailed, we were moving, this was happening. I felt like I had to be Johnny on the spot for a while, like if they tried to reach out to me via email or instant message, and by god, if they called me on my work phone, I made sure I was there. Because even though I wasn't there, I wanted to make sure when they reached out I was available.

Justin Draeger: My advice to folks that are teleworking with skeptical bosses is you need to make sure you're responsive. At least during the work hours. Be responsive, because if they can't find you repeatedly, then it starts to become a problem.

Beth Maglione: I have one question, and I want to frame the question, if you have a partial or full time telework policy at your school, how does that effect your culture and I want to frame it because like I see some cultural benefits to it. Like, I mean, you can really increase the diversity of your staff if you're not just having to pick from the people that walk in your front door, if you can pick from a nationwide pool of candidates, that's one thing that seems to be very culturally positive.

Beth Maglione: Working parents, they might be able to do a seven or eight hour in office workday, but not a 10 hour workday, and that's what you have when you add a commute onto something like that.

Beth Maglione: So I see some benefits there, then I also see how there can be some challenges, like make basic assumptions about how your teammates like to communicate, and if you don't know them very well you could be making very wrong assumptions. In terms of just general office culture, I see pluses and minuses and I'm curious if you have experienced or observed any of that.

Jim White: Well it would be great if you're going to have an employee who's going to work at home the majority of the time, to figure out opportunities for that person to be part of the team at key moments, key opportunities, or maybe even routinely. But however you can culturally ... bring them into the culture when it's appropriate, like a celebratory thing, maybe it's a Christmas party, they come out to the Christmas party, whatever that is. It's easier for us because all of our folks are in town. It's harder for you where they're in Alabama, or in Ohio, or wherever.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. It's ... I'll say, it was really kind of weird at first, but when we have like events we will literally turn on our conference equipment and have teleworkers like tune in.

Beth Maglione: To our lunch and stuff.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, it-

Beth Maglione: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: Sometimes ... at the beginning it felt a little weird. But I don't think it's that weird. I mean, now I'm sort of used to it. I come in, we're having a staff whatever, and there's the teleworkers, and you say hi to them, and they don't usually stay for the whole thing, because it's hard to keep up with the cross conversations. But it's making an effort, like yeah, keep people dialed in, connected.

Justin Draeger: And I can remember several ... this was many years ago, the NASFAA board, or the chair at the time, who was Pam Fowler, University of Michigan, pulled me aside and just said, "Hey, we want to make sure that at NASFAA, you are bringing the staff in at least once or twice a year, all together, there's real value in being together, even if you are dispersed." And it was a point well taken.

Beth Maglione: Yeah. I mean, it sounds like what you're both saying is this idea of being really intentional about rolling out a program of telework, and not just sort of letting it happen slapdash. And by intentional, I mean you've got to budget in advance for that. Bringing everybody in is just to hang out and have a good time has like real, tangible value, but also costs money. And I feel like when we're all looking at bottom lines, it's probably like well, I could justify it if it was for a project, but if it's just to hang out and have fun, that might be harder to justify. But I think you're right, there's value there too.

Jim White: Right. Well, you're building a team. And the only way you can really build that team and maintain that team is by personal connection.

Justin Draeger: Jim, for those who are interested and maybe don't have teleworking at their offices and might be interested in reaching out to you to learn more about how you guys have done it at your office, how can they get in touch with you?

Jim White: They can email me, whitej@gonzaga.edu, or call 509-313-6568. And if they want to they can also speak with Sarah Everett in my office who really has a good handle on what we're doing, and is really kind of the one that pushes me outside of my comfort zone with this particular topic.

Jim White: So happy to be of help to other schools.

Joelle Fredman: Nice.

Justin Draeger: Thanks for joining us for another edition of "Director Download." I want to thank Jim White for coming in. I want to thank Brie Reynolds for providing us her expertise. All of these podcast episodes are being done in preparation for the NASFAA Leadership and Legislative Conference, which will be held here in Washington, DC February 25 through 27, we look forward to another edition of "Director Download," send us your comments, remember to subscribe and tell a friend.