

Business is brewing at local coffee houses

Three times a week Michelle Dumler packs up her laptop and heads to her office. It has lots of windows, a nice large working space and terrific coffee. Her office also happens to be in a quiet corner at the QFC Village Starbucks just a few blocks from home. Michelle is one of today's many business professionals who gravitate to public places to conduct business, and it's not for the purpose of saving money on rented space.



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Out-of-office offices serve a variety of business needs. For Dumler, Senior Marketing Manager for Akona Systems, it is an opportunity to get away from the kids. "As a consultant, I generally work in my home office in the morning while the kids are at school," says Dumler. In the afternoon, I have a nanny come to the

house to look after them and I come here to work." Dumler will spend a couple of quiet hours writing marketing copy and sipping coffee without the interruptions which inevitably occur with young children around. Having a mobile office also enables Dumler to have some variety. In the summer, she likes to work at one of the tables outside the cafe. If she has lots of phone calls to make, she goes to the Community

Center. "Coffee shops can be noisy. They aren't good places to work if you are on the phone a lot," she advises.

Although Lyne Johnston doesn't have young children to disrupt her, she finds working in her home office can still be distracting with the constant reminder of household chores left undone. As a loan officer for Liberty Financial Group, she also has a tra-

ditional office where she can work, but prefers working in public. "I am an extrovert," said Johnston. "I get my energy from being around people." Johnston enjoys the networking that takes place in more relaxed commercial environments. She also has criteria. "I only go to establishments that offer free wireless Internet service. I feel good about supporting them because they are helping me." Johnston's favorite public work spaces include Tully's, The Bellevue Art Museum and the Community Center at Mercer View. All have free wireless connections.

Ellen Ahearn also prefers free wireless establishments although she does have an account with a wireless provider which comes in handy at airports. Noah's Bagels on Mercer Island is one of her favorite stops because of its central location between her daughter's school on the Eastside and frequent meetings in Seattle. A CFO for Clear Ink, a digital marketing and strategy design service in Berkeley, CA, Ahearn has been working remotely for several years. "I work wherever I want," said Ahearn. "For me it is all about convenience."

If you see Dennis Hebert at a coffee shop, he won't be alone sipping coffee behind his laptop. A business partner with "Partner" On-Call, his service is to help people buy, improve and sell small to mid-size businesses. "Building relationships with people is an important part of what I



do. Sometimes that is more difficult in a traditional office setting. An invitation for coffee is much more appealing and less threatening than a formal business meeting." Hebert sees other advantages to holding business meetings over a cup of joe. For one, the client doesn't have the interruptions that often arise in an office setting. He also knows that many of the people he talks to want the meeting kept confidential. Meeting outside the office is less likely to arouse the suspicion of curious bosses and coworkers.

Working in public can have its drawbacks. Hebert points out that

on some occasions seating isn't available. Noisy blenders and ice machines can put a crimp in a serious conversation as well. If your timing is off, you could run in to the young mother crowd with crying babies and out of control toddlers. By meeting at the same location frequently, you get to know its rhythm - when the tennis crowd meets, when it's easier to park, which times during the day it is quieter and less crowded.

Taking your office public also requires some rules of etiquette. Be sure to order something during your two hour stay...and leave a generous tip. If the store is crowded, don't

monopolize more space than necessary by spreading out your work. Go outside for loud or animated phone conversations. And remember, your mother doesn't work there, so clean up your mess.

Terry Pile is principal of Career Advisors providing career counseling, outplacement and relocated partner employment assistance to individuals and small businesses. She specializes in helping people find satisfying work and can be contacted at terryp@careeradvisorsonline.com.

Islander Lyne
Johnston, a loan officer with Liberty Financial Group, checks her email at Tully's Coffee on Mercer Island Friday.

Chad Coleman/
Mercer Island Reporter