



IBM boasts a large cadre of experienced teleworkers, but Dan Miller is unique. While most IBM remote workers cover administrative or marketing needs, Dan is the only teleworking technical support specialist. Situated in the small Eastern Washington town of Curlew, Dan provides remote assistance for IBM field technicians, who call him for assistance when they need help diagnosing and repairing difficult problems and hardware failures. Dan's colleagues, who work in Charlotte, North Carolina, use an IBM tool called Same Time Connect to communicate with him. The tool works like instant messaging, and allows Dan to be immediately available whenever he's needed.

A 20 year veteran at IBM, Dan was working out of the Seattle office when he realized that since the majority of his time was spent on the phone, his was a job that could be performed anywhere. The communication system used for his work is text-based, which means it can move fast even on a dial-up system, and as an expert on an established and stable product line, he felt that his situation was a good fit for teleworking. The remote worker system at IBM was well established, but not for his specific job description. Dan says, "Step one was getting someone to accept the fact that I could be a teleworker from a rural community. The combination of my long-time experience with the company and some innovative thinking by my managers allowed me to do what I had wanted to do for quite a while, return home to Curlew."

The catalyst for his decision to move back to his roots was a casual comment by his daughter in the mid-1990s. At that time, Dan was traveling frequently around the Northwest and stopped home to pack for another trip. His 8-year-old daughter Nichole caught up with him and asked him if he was home to stay or just stopping to change his clothes again. It was a life-changing moment for Dan. He says, "I realized I had my focus in the wrong direction. When it becomes obvious to everyone but you that you're falling down on the job at home, then it's time to do something different."

Dan and his wife decided to relocate while their children were still young enough to experience growing up in a small town. Since their move back to Curlew in 1999, his most critical technology challenge has been the lack of a local broadband connection. Dan accesses the Internet through a dial-up connection, routes through an IBM VPN server and connects directly into IBM's intranet. The absence of powerful Internet access can be daunting, but his local ISP, Pure World Internet (PWI) out of Spokane, is a great partner. As Dan puts it, "I can turn to PWI's support system for help, but I rarely have problems – maybe twice a year." Urban workers might envy that level of uptime! Dan believes that his need for powerful connectivity will eventually be met through increasingly affordable satellite Internet service.

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In the meantime, Dan is happy with his decision to relocate to a small, rural community. He's been able to re-establish old ties and has become active in community programs; he's a former school board member, a basketball coach and is involved with the local PUD. When asked what advice he'd give others considering a move to a rural community, Dan is clear, "Things move more slowly in a small town. You don't get lost in the crowd here. If I had it to do again, I'd do it in a heartbeat."