

Why Workers Are Calling BS on Leaders About Returning to The Office



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"As companies gradually open their doors, they must consider how to reintroduce staff to the office environment (and each other)."

BY HALEY WOZNYJ

4 Ways to Prevent Culture Shock as Employees Return to Work

For the last year, many employees have been working remotely in an attempt to curb the spread of COVID-19. However, as vaccine efforts ramp up, companies are starting to announce their return to the office. Amazon says its corporate employees could be back in the office by fall, while other companies like Ford Motor Company, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), and Facebook could bring their employees back by early summer. Some companies, such as Uber and Microsoft, have already opened their doors to employees.

As these plans come to fruition, we can finally say goodbye to Zoom meetings and reluctantly put our athleisure wear away. But organizations and leaders shouldn't hastily welcome employees back; they need to give the return to the office some thought. This shift can be a culture shock for employees who have become accustomed to working remotely. It's important to carefully consider how to best reintroduce employees back to the office, and perhaps more importantly, to each other. After all, one of the main benefits of returning to the office is to reignite those more organic processes that are hard to replicate virtually. Here are four tips for helping to facilitate the return to the office.



FOCUS ON TEAM BUILDING

In the last year, there have likely been personnel changes in teams and departments—some members may have left, others may have joined. In addition to new members, teams have been communicating primarily via email and teleconferencing. While these tools have helped us to weather the proverbial remote-work storm, they make it difficult to build trust and limit our ability to give and understand complex information. As a result, team members will need to become reacquainted with one another and with their leader once they're back in the office.

Although we love to hate them, team-building exercises can help build and strengthen relationships, promote cohesion, and create positive roles and norms for how the team should operate moving forward. Ideas for exercises designed to promote these human connections include: picnicking, a food or wine tasting, volunteering, or a hands-on experience like crafting. These activities can encourage long-term team effectiveness and also help us brush up on those social skills we haven't used in a while.

PROVIDE SUPPORT TO EMPLOYEES

Research suggests employees look to their organizations and leaders for support at work. This is particularly the case when employees must navigate uncharted waters, like the ebbs and flows of working during a pandemic. As employees return to work and experience yet another change, organizations can help ease the transition. Organizations can provide more tangible support to employees. Health experts warn the pandemic is far from over. Employees still have different comfort levels about being around others. Providing employees with resources to help keep them safe and combat the virus can help quell concerns. Goldman Sachs has instituted temperature checks for employees coming into the office. In a recent Society for Human Resource Management survey, over three-quarters



of organizations surveyed said they would implement social distancing, add contactless procedures, and are providing personal protective equipment to employees. Further, organizations should provide other equipment or technology that employees might need to do their jobs, which may have changed slightly due to the pandemic.

Supervisors can offer more personal or emotional support to employees. It's unlikely that the stressors associated with the pandemic will cease once employees go back to work. In fact, the return could actually increase the amount of stress and anxiety that employees experience. Supervisors should spend time checking in with their employees, showing empathy and compassion for various situations that might arise, and asking whether employees need any resources to complete their job. It's important to deliver on that latter point should employees request it. Some organizations like Workday and Cigna have taken a more systematic approach and have increased access to mental health resources (i.e., subscriptions to the Headspace app and behavioral health coaching) for their employees to help ease stress and anxiety.

FAST COMPANY EVENTS

Fast Company announces details of seventh annual innovation festival

"The Rebuilders" will explore opportunities to reshape business, community, and culture, post-pandemic.

EMPHASIZE FLEXIBILITY

There are aspects of remote work that employees have come to enjoy over the last year, such as a lack of commute and taking a catnap at lunchtime. In a recent PwC survey, over half of employees surveyed said they wanted to continue to work



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remotely at least three days per week. There's no reason why companies can't retain some of those aspects, particularly because the need for flexible schedules may still exist (i.e., caring for sick relatives, childcare, encouraging social distancing). Companies like Target and JPMorgan Chase have signaled they are not requiring that employees come back full time. Google's parent company recently announced 20% of its employees will work remotely "wherever they work best" permanently. The option for remote work will still exist, should employees want to take it.

Prior to COVID-19, many companies were adamant that remote work decreased productivity because employees couldn't be trusted to work without a watchful eye on them. However, the pandemic has demonstrated that employees can be successful at home and sometimes even work longer hours compared to working in the office. There's also the added benefit of reduced overhead costs. Research suggests when employees are offered the option for flexible schedules (i.e., compressed workweeks, remote work, choice in hours, they are more satisfied with their jobs and more committed to the organization. Giving employees some say in how they structure their schedules can yield numerous benefits. General Motors's CEO, Mary Barra, is embracing this notion by trusting employees to work remotely as long as they "work appropriately."

CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS

Over the last year, organizational policies and standard operating procedures have likely adapted to the evolving COVID-19 situation. They may change more with the return to the office. It will be important for organizations and leaders to clearly lay out expectations for employees before, during, and after the transition back to in-person work. Any future changes should be communicated fully, transparently, and in a timely manner to keep employees up to speed. Marriot, who was hit hard during the pandemic has been a key leader



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in valuing transparency and honesty in communication.

An often-overlooked component of organizational communication is upward communication—where employees can voice their thoughts and opinions and ask questions of those higher up in the organization. It's important to create an outlet for employees to voice concerns and questions, without fear of reprimand, to ensure that employees know what is expected of them and to alert senior leaders to potential issues that might interfere with their duties.



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"In March, thousands of white collar workers were forced into a gigantic work-from-home experiment. Some things are already clear."

BY JULIA HERBST

3 Lessons COVID-19 Has Taught Us About Remote Work

Citi's CEO, Michael Corbat, thinks productivity may suffer with long-term remote work. Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg anticipates as much as half of Facebook's employees will transition to working remotely over the next five to 10 years. Netflix's Reed Hastings believes working from home is "a pure negative."

Over the past nine-plus months, just about every major CEO has declared remote work the new way of the world, a necessary evil, or—less frequently—somewhere in between. And it's not just CEOs. Since the start of the pandemic, my inbox has been filled with contributed pieces from thought leaders and experts which can generally fall into one of two categories: A) Why we can't wait to go back to the office after the pandemic, or B) Why we're never in a million years going back to the office post-pandemic.

These strong opinions make sense. For individual workers, March's sudden transition meant figuring out Zoom etiquette (and Zoom fatigue, wondering what happened to that "extra" time now that you don't have a commute, and what to do when your kid or dog interrupts your meeting for the fourth time. For managers overseeing disparate teams, sometimes across time zones, this change has provided its own challenges.



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Add in the fact that every worker has their own remote work set up, tools, preferences for collaboration, and tolerance for troubleshooting tech, and it's no wonder we all feel differently. Some love the flexibility that working from home provides, while others miss their quiet cubicles, running into their coworkers in the communal kitchen, or just having a real reason to get dressed each morning.

The data suggests that even once it's safe again to go back to an in-person work environment, plenty of employees won't be rushing to return to 9-5s at their office desks. In a recent report by ManpowerGroup, most of the workers surveyed said they'd prefer working two to three days in an office, and working remotely the rest of the time.

Which brings us to that sticky question of productivity—surely the lion's share of the calculation that Hastings, Zuckerberg, or any CEO, is making. Can employees get as much done while working from their kitchen table?

The short answer seems to be “yes.” Mercer surveyed 800 employers and 94% said that productivity was unaffected—or even improved—compared to its pre-pandemic levels.

But it's not that simple, of course. Quality matters, too. Leaders from across industries have agonized about the other intangible factors affecting remote teams. What do video meetings mean for creative brainstorming and innovation? How can you preserve company culture when you only see your coworkers in rectangular boxes on your screen? What does it mean for employee mental health when the only thing separating “work” and “life” is whether you're using your company-provided laptop, or your personal one?

Unsurprisingly, these factors are harder to quantify. But a few things are already clear about this huge work-from-home experiment we've embarked on:



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THERE ISN'T ONE VERSION OF REMOTE WORK

Unlike the Buffers or GitLabs of the world, most companies were thrust into the work from home game suddenly, when the world started to shut down in mid-March. Teams first had to figure out the practical logistics (selecting video conferencing tools, distributing work laptops, etc.) before even beginning to think about more theoretical concerns. So working remotely at some companies meant just trying to replicate the type of activities that usually happened in-office. But at other institutions that were further along, leaders were focused on building a successful culture where employees felt connected and empowered to do creative work.

When I spoke with Sid Sijbrandij, GitLab's CEO, back in March, just as many companies were first making the transition, he was quick to point out that "working remotely" didn't look the same across all companies. "We're trying to do our part in teaching the world, 'Hey, remote is more than just using Slack and Zoom,'" he told me.

SUCCESSFUL REMOTE TEAMS OFTEN REQUIRE RESTRUCTURING—AND SUPPORT

Many companies that have decided to invest in remote work long-term have realized that it requires leadership to make a genuine investment to succeed. That includes articulating clear goals and values—and setting an example about how remote work should look. Creating an environment where employees remain engaged is not an undertaking that mid-level managers can solve by holding more frequent check-ins with direct reports.

In fact, more frequent check-ins and micromanaging is generally the wrong approach when trying to build a productive remote team, say experts. Instead, managers should prioritize results over hours logged.



“What if you had an organization that could eliminate most layers of management?” writes remote work expert and former CEO of Optiva Danielle Royston. “Start to think about what changes to your business processes you’d have to make so that employees could work with zero management overhead.”

One thing that a number of tech companies, including Facebook, are increasingly opting for: Hiring a head of remote work. The position is intended to help create a cohesive experience for all workers, says Brynn Harrington, vice president of people growth at Facebook. “We’re looking for the person with influence, skills, and experience who can help us pivot the company. When we think about the transformation to remote, it’s a wholesale shift in how we run.”

It’s a recent shift. A report from T3 Advisors of 95 tech companies found that only 2% had a designated leader to oversee remote work in August 2020, but that number had climbed to 12% by November 2020.

MORE FLEXIBILITY IS GREAT, BUT IT DOESN'T SOLVE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS

One of the biggest perks touted by remote work evangelists is the flexibility it provides. Need to be home for the plumber, or because your kid is sick? Not a problem. Need to take your dog for a 3 p.m. walk? Now you can. And for teams that work asynchronously, workers have even more options—a boon for night owls, midday exercisers, or anyone who appreciates being trusted to get their work done when it’s most convenient for them.

But while flexibility can be helpful for working parents—especially mothers, who often shoulder the majority of caretaking responsibilities—it’s dangerous to think of it as a solution to the underlying caregiving crisis playing out in



homes across the country.

Parents have been largely left to their own devices during the pandemic, cut off from much of the childcare support they once relied upon. Sure, some companies have extended flexible leave for working white-collar parents, allowed them to shift or reduce their hours, or offered additional perks and benefits.

But while being allowed to work from home is a privilege that many lack, juggling full-time work, plus supervising remote learning is untenable for months on end. So it's no wonder many are dropping out. According to the Labor department, in September, 865,000 women left the workforce. That more than four times the number of men.

“Working mothers don’t need bike shares,” writes senior staff writer Ainsley Harris. “They certainly don’t need magic shows. They need their companies to act as better corporate citizens and advocate for policies that address the daily needs of parents across the payroll spectrum.”

Until substantive changes are made to provide families affordable childcare, women will continue to be left out. “We’re already seeing and will continue to see fundamental rollbacks in women’s gains in the workforce—in earnings, promotions, and leadership,” Katherine Eyster, the director of strategic partnerships and policy initiatives at the National Partnership for Women and Families, told staff writer Pavithra Mohan back in August.

It’s a significant cost—and not just for the women and their families. Companies will miss out, too. And, while it may be easier to see who is missing when you’re all sitting around an office conference table and not on a Zoom call, make no mistake: Remote work isn’t a success unless it works for everyone.



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"These three strategies can help you convince your manager to let you stay remote, even when it's safe to return to the office."

BY DIANA SHI

How To Ask Your Boss To Let You Keep Working From Home

After a year of working remotely, many of us have settled into a routine. But as vaccination rates rise and businesses reopen across the U.S., many employers are starting to consider bringing workers back to the office, at least part time.

Employees may feel slightly differently. In a survey conducted by PwC at the beginning of 2021, 75% of executives predicted that "at least half of office employees will be working in the office" by July 2021, while just 61% of employees agreed with this prediction. Moreover, when leaders were asked how many in-person days were necessary to "maintain a distinctive culture" for their companies, about 30% of executives responded that employees should be in the office three days a week, while only 15% of executives responded with two days a week.

This isn't to say every manager needs to be convinced of the value of remote work. For instance, the CEO of GM, Mary Barra, has shared that "the future of work is not a one-size-fits-all approach." But if you're anticipating a need to convince your boss, it helps to go in with the right timing and statistics at your fingertips. For instance: Employees have actually experienced increased productivity during the year-plus of working remotely, despite the global pandemic.

If you work for a company that is embracing a more flexible or hybrid work format—or if you've seen your personal productivity skyrocket while working remotely—here are some tips for tackling this important conversation.



1. GET YOUR PLAN TOGETHER

If your aim is to continue working from home, you have to be prepared to make your case. Your manager may be reviewing the work you've done over the last year, but what they need is concrete evidence of why you are at your most productive while working from home.

It may be wise to think of your approach as a pitch meeting, where you come prepared with a presentation and with some responses to potential questions your manager may raise. Your presentation can take the form of whatever format your boss is most receptive to: a PowerPoint, a short handout, or a direct conversation. Whichever medium they prefer, make sure to be clear that you've thought about your request and are confident that it will be beneficial to your productivity.

"Twenty-four hours prior to the meeting, send your manager an outline," advises Ashley Stahl, a career expert at finance management company SoFi. Within this outline, go into as much detail as possible and don't shy away from providing specific evidence.

From there, include your road map for bigger projects in the months and full year ahead. You should provide the exact days and hours you will be working from home. If you plan to adopt a hybrid schedule, share what days you plan to be in the office. Finally, Stahl recommends emphasizing how you'll be reachable when you're working from home, in order to demonstrate that you won't be letting yourself slack off.

2. STATE YOUR CASE

In order to get the most amenable answer from your boss, show them how you've improved over the last year of remote work. This includes going back and reviewing your progress so you can lay out some metrics. Stahl says this could include stating things like the fact that you had a "90% client



retention rate,” or used “15% fewer sick days than last year” because you worked from home.

In addition, it’s likely you are not alone in wanting to work from home. Likely many workers (including those at your company) are wondering whether they will have the option to work remotely. It may be the case that the early bird catches the worm, so it’s best to ask as soon as possible.

You can also try to bring focus back to the concerns raised at the onset of the global pandemic: prioritizing a company-wide sense of safety and security. If you’re still recovering from trauma from the early days of COVID-19 or hoping to preserve improved mental health as a result of working from home, make that clear to your boss. However your boss responds, they’ll at least be aware of what type of setting you need to get your best work done.

It’s important to be direct about your intentions and needs when you are presenting your case for long-term remote work. “If you’re considering relocation, be honest,” recommends Stahl. “An employer will not want to lose you as an employee if that’s the reality.”

In the worst-case scenario, in which your boss requires you to return to the office and you cannot reconcile this, then it may be time to set your job sights elsewhere. “If you know, without a doubt, that remote life is the only work life for you, consider whether a new job is something to pursue. With 55% of companies around the world currently offering some form of remote-working capacity, your chances of finding a remote job are on the rise,” Stahl says.

3. PREPARE FOR A CONTRADICTION RESPONSE

You may receive a no from your boss. In this case, you should be mentally prepared to adjust your current reality to a setup that is less than your preferred environment. “If the answer is a finite no, and you’ve found yourself full-time back in the



office, do what you can to take the pieces of working from home that you loved back to the office with you,” Stahl suggests.

Workers who’ve grown accustomed to taking brief breaks every few hours or who preferred to have more desk space may try reaching out to HR to create a more welcoming arrangement. The pandemic has shown us one thing: Not all workers are the same, and managers need to adjust to changing dynamics. Says Stahl, “If you enjoyed taking five-minute walks at the top of every hour, do so [in your office] as well. If open space and a sense of cleanliness helped you work, talk with your manager and HR to create this same environment on-site.”

If you’re faced with pushback or a no from your boss, hear their point of view and then try to compromise. “Your manager wants to keep you happy, but they also need to potentially consult with HR or upper management,” Stahl says. “Make sure you come off as a team player, and you’re prepared to perhaps meet in the middle in some way.”

Also, it’s likely if you are fortunate to receive permission to work from home, you may be one of a small number of participants, with potential to be excluded from collaboration opportunities. Taking time for gratitude, Stahl says, can help you embrace the most positives of the office. These perks include, “a spike in networking opportunities . . . face-to-face connection, and a more hands-on approach to contributing to company culture.”

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WHY WORKERS ARE CALLING BS ON LEADERS ABOUT RETURNING TO THE OFFICE

"Workforce scholars find that employees are feeling burned over broken work-from-home promises and corporate culture 'BS' as employers try to bring them back to the office."

BY KIMBERLY MERRIMAN AND DAVID GREENWAY AND TAMARA MONTAG-SMIT

Why Workers Are Calling Bs On Leaders About Returning To The Office

As vaccinations and relaxed health guidelines make returning to the office a reality for more companies, there seems to be a disconnect between managers and their workers over remote work.

A good example of this is a recent op-ed written by the CEO of a Washington, D.C., magazine that suggested workers could lose benefits such as healthcare if they insist on continuing to work remotely as the COVID-19 pandemic recedes. The staff reacted by refusing to publish for a day.

While the CEO later apologized, she isn't alone in appearing to bungle the transition back to the office after over a year in which tens of millions of employees were forced to work from home. A recent survey of full-time corporate or government employees found that two-thirds say their employers either have not communicated a post-pandemic office strategy or have only vaguely done so.

As workforce scholars, we are interested in teasing out how workers are dealing with this situation. Our recent research found that this failure to communicate clearly is hurting morale, culture, and retention.



WORKERS RELOCATING

We first began investigating workers' pandemic experiences in July 2020 as shelter-in-place orders shuttered offices and remote work was widespread. At the time, we wanted to know how workers were using their newfound freedom to potentially work virtually from anywhere.

We analyzed a data set that a business and technology newsletter attained from surveying its 585,000 active readers. It asked them whether they planned to relocate during the next six months and to share their story about why and where from and to.

After a review, we had just under 3,000 responses, including 1,361 people who were planning to relocate or had recently done so. We systematically coded these responses to understand their motives and, based on distances moved, the degree of ongoing remote-work policy they would likely need.

We found that a segment of these employees would require a full remote-work arrangement based on the distance moved from their office, and another portion would face a longer commute. Woven throughout this was the explicit or implicit expectation of some degree of ongoing remote work among many of the workers who moved during the pandemic.

In other words, many of these workers were moving on the assumption—or promise—that they'd be able to keep working remotely at least some of the time after the pandemic ended. Or they seemed willing to quit if their employer didn't oblige.

We wanted to see how these expectations were being met as the pandemic started to wind down in March 2021. So we searched online communities in Reddit to see what workers were saying. One forum proved particularly useful. A member asked, "Has your employer made remote work permanent yet or is it still in the air?" and went on to share his own experience. This post generated 101 responses with a good



amount of detail on what their respective individual companies were doing.

While this qualitative data is only a small sample that is not necessarily representative of the U.S. population at large, these posts allowed us to delve into a richer understanding of how workers feel, which a simple stat can't provide.

We found a disconnect between workers and management that starts with but goes beyond the issue of the remote-work policy itself. Broadly speaking, we found three recurring themes in these anonymous posts.

1. BROKEN REMOTE-WORK PROMISES

Others have also found that people are taking advantage of pandemic-related remote work to relocate to a city at a distance large enough that it would require partial or full-time remote work after people return to the office.

A recent survey by consulting firm PwC found that almost a quarter of workers were considering or planning to move more than 50 miles from one of their employer's main offices. The survey also found 12% have already made such a move during the pandemic without getting a new job.

Our early findings suggested some workers would quit their current job rather than give up their new location if required by their employer, and we saw this actually start to occur in March.

One worker planned a move from Phoenix to Tulsa with her fiancé to get a bigger place with cheaper rent after her company went remote. She later had to leave her job for the move, even though "they told me they would allow me to work from home, then said never mind about it."

Another worker indicated the promise to work remotely was only implicit, but he still had his hopes up when leaders "gassed us up for months saying we'd likely be able to keep



working from home and come in occasionally” and then changed their minds and demanded employees return to the office once vaccinated.

2. CONFUSED REMOTE-WORK POLICIES

Another constant refrain we read in the worker comments was disappointment in their company’s remote-work policy—or lack thereof.

Whether workers said they were staying remote for now, returning to the office, or still unsure, we found that nearly a quarter of the people in our sample said their leaders were not giving them meaningful explanations of what was driving the policy. Even worse, the explanations sometimes felt confusing or insulting.

One worker complained that the manager “wanted butts in seats because we couldn’t be trusted to [work from home] even though we’d been doing it since last March,” adding: “I’m giving my notice on Monday.”

Another, whose company issued a two-week timeline for all to return to the office, griped: “Our leadership felt people weren’t as productive at home. While as a company we’ve hit most of our goals for the year. . . . Makes no sense.”

After a long period of office shutterings, it stands to reason workers would need time to readjust to office life, a point expressed in recent survey results. Employers that quickly flip the switch in calling workers back and do so with poor clarifying rationale risk appearing tone-deaf.

It suggests a lack of trust in productivity at a time when many workers report putting in more effort than ever and being strained by the increased digital intensity of their job—that is, the growing number of online meetings and chats.

And even when companies said they wouldn’t require a return to the office, workers still faulted them for their motives, which many employees described as financially motivated.



“We are going hybrid,” one worker wrote. “I personally don’t think the company is doing it for us. I think they realized how efficient and how much money they are saving.”

Only a small minority of workers in our sample said their company asked for input on what employees actually want from a future remote work policy. Given that leaders are rightly concerned about company culture, we believe they are missing a key opportunity to engage with workers on the issue and show their policy rationales aren’t only about dollars and cents.

3. CORPORATE CULTURE “BS”

Management gurus such as Peter Drucker and other scholars have found that corporate culture is very important to binding together workers in an organization, especially in times of stress.

A company’s culture is essentially its values and beliefs shared among its members. That’s harder to foster when everyone is working remotely.

That’s likely why corporate human resource executives rank maintaining organizational culture as their top workforce priority for 2021.

But many of the forum posts we reviewed suggested that employer efforts to do that during the pandemic by orchestrating team outings and other get-togethers were actually pushing workers away, and that this type of “culture building” was not welcome.

One worker’s company “had everyone come into the office for an outdoor luncheon a week ago,” according to a post, adding: “Idiots.”

Surveys have found that what workers want most from management, on the issue of corporate culture, are more remote-work resources, updated policies on flexibility, and



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more communication from leadership.

As another worker put it, “I can tell you, most people really don’t give 2 flips about ‘company culture’ and think it’s BS.”

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"Because plans for the future are in flux, now's a good time for you to have some influence on your post-pandemic work"

BY ART MARKMAN

Now Is The Time To Design Your Post-Pandemic Work Life

We're past the one-year anniversary of the lockdown in the United States after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite a concerning surge in infection rates, vaccination is proceeding rapidly, and many states are making the vaccine available to everyone. As a result, many of us are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Organizations are beginning to think about what work life is going to look like in the new normal. Clearly, people were able to be productive while working from home. Many people actually found a lot to like about the work-from-home environment, including the absence of a commute and the ability to interleave work and family responsibilities.

Because plans for the future are in flux, now is a good time for you to have some influence on what the post-pandemic work environment looks like. But that will require a little planning.

Start by grabbing a sheet of paper (or a spreadsheet) and dividing it into three columns. Label them: What do I miss? What do I love? What do I do?

In the first column, think back to those bygone days when work was normal. Which aspects of that have you been unable to duplicate? It might have been spending time working closely with colleagues, traveling to visit customers and clients, or having a workspace with whiteboards, bulletin boards, and environments you could organize to make you more productive.



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Over the last year, most people have tried to do the best they can to stay busy and productive during a difficult time. As we shift into the post-COVID-19 environment, though, it is important to be mindful about how to reinstate some of what you used to be able to do effectively. That might mean going to the office more often, adding travel back into your schedule, or getting a budget to redo a part of your home office.

It is important to think about that now, because, if there are things you really want to be included in plans for the future, you should be communicating about that with supervisors and other people involved in planning right now. It will be much harder to influence those plans once they have been laid out in more detail.

In the second column, focus on what has gone well in your work-from-home environment. You might enjoy the flexibility, the lack of commute, or having a private workspace most of the time. Perhaps you moved away from the city where your job is located and are loving not being tied to a particular region of the country.

You'd like to preserve as much of the benefit of the work-from-home environment as possible after the pandemic. Communicate with your supervisor about what you think has gone well. People in leadership positions often have strong opinions about how their employees should work, but those opinions would benefit from knowing more specifics about your experience. Provide input even if you haven't been asked for it yet.

Finally, you need to start thinking more about what actions you will need to take in order to make the new work environment good for you. That way, when your organization does announce its plans for the future, you can prepare for your ideal environment. The aim here is to be specific about what you need to do—specific enough that you could put particular actions on your calendar and get them done.



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If you are going to continue working from home, then you need to figure out the obstacles to having the ideal workspace and then prepare to overcome them. If you get stuck solving these problems, reach out to colleagues and talk about how they handle these issues. Don't let the subpar aspects of working from home persist if the temporary becomes the permanent.

If you are going to be returning to work, then what can you do to ensure that some of the great things about work-from-home survive? Do you need to negotiate some more flexible time? Do you need to find a less intensive way to commute to work?

The reality is that when we shift to the post-COVID-19 era, there will be a few weeks where there is a renewed opportunity to change habits and fix the workplace environment. After that, the flood of work will kick in, and you'll lose the window of opportunity to improve your work life or your work-life balance. Preparing for that shift in advance is a great way to ensure you don't miss out on the chance to get the best of both worlds.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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► WHY WORKERS ARE CALLING BS ON LEADERS ABOUT RETURNING TO THE OFFICE

"And what to say if you want to stay at your current job, but work remotely some of the time."

BY SARA SUTTON

How To Find A New Remote Job If Your Current Employer Wants You Back In The Office

The global pandemic has permanently reshaped the workplace and how, when, and where people work. Business models have been forever disrupted with the realization that remote work is smart, strategic, and sustainable for companies to embrace, improving not only the bottom line but also providing benefits to the overall workforce.

Before the pandemic, only 5.2% of the U.S. workforce worked from home full time. Today, 58% are working remotely. And according to a new FlexJobs survey of more than 2,000 pandemic remote workers, 65% would prefer to stay fully remote after the pandemic, and 58% say they would "absolutely" look for a new job if they weren't allowed to continue working remotely in their current position. But not all businesses are ready to make the leap to long-term remote work.

If you're a professional whose company is asking everyone to return to the office, what are your options?

The good news is that the remote job market has grown by leaps and bounds this year, and will likely continue to do so. FlexJobs saw a 76% increase in fully remote job listings in 2020 over 2019.

And even if a company isn't ready for fully remote work, 82% of middle-market CEOs say they are likely to allow for a partially remote workforce even after the pandemic is over.



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Let's tackle both situations: How to find a new, permanently remote job—and what to say if you want to stay at your current job, but work remotely some of the time.

STRATEGY 1: LOOKING FOR A PERMANENTLY REMOTE JOB

If you've been working remotely for the past year, you have remote work experience—a highly valuable asset in your remote-job search. Mention this remote experience on your resume and in cover letters.

What counts as remote experience?

- Working not in the same physical space as your co-workers, across time zones or in different offices, for example
- Working from home occasionally or regularly
- Earning a degree or certification online
- Volunteering where you did most of the work from your home office

Along with having some remote experience and strong remote skills, the key is to communicate that remote work experience and skills into your application materials. We recommend job seekers frame their application materials (resume, cover letter) very specifically when applying to a remote job versus non-remote jobs.

Here are three specific ways to highlight your remote work experience and skills on your resume:

1. State it clearly. In your Experience section, mention “Remote Work” next to your job title or location. For example, Director of Marketing (100% Remote Work) or High School Biology Teacher, Partially Remote Work, Anaheim, CA.



2. Include your experience or skills in the descriptions of your past jobs. For example, “led a team of five customer service reps in a completely remote-work environment, and successfully earned an average team satisfaction rating of 94%.”
3. Build it into your skills section. For example, make sure you list the types of skills it takes to be a successful remote worker. Time and task management, communication, self-management, the ability to work independently, and comfort with technology are some of the top skills employers like to see when hiring for remote jobs.

Lastly, be sure you’re looking for remote jobs in the most trustworthy of places. Unfortunately, there is a long history of work-from-home scams. The Federal Trade Commission received more than 58,000 reports of work-from-home scams between 2015 and 2019, with victims losing an average of \$1,200 to a scam. And the pandemic has only increased their prevalence.

How can you stay safe? Start with specialized remote-work sites, and no matter the site, pay attention to the quality control process for their job listings. Do they screen every job and company before posting, or rely on job seekers to self-screen? It’s important to use remote job sources that help connect you to the best listings, and stay clear of the scams, multi-level marketing, and other less-than-professional opportunities.



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STRATEGY 2: NEGOTIATING A HYBRID REMOTE WORK ARRANGEMENT

If you enjoy your current role, but you're not interested in working from the office all the time, you're not alone! According to that same FlexJobs survey, 33% of professionals would prefer a hybrid work situation after the pandemic.

Our Career Coaching Team recommends the following approach when asking for a hybrid work situation:

1. Ask your manager for a meeting to discuss your options. Here's a sample that you can adapt:
2. To best prepare for the coming months, I'd like to get a good sense of the company's plans to return to the office and what the options are for longer-term remote work. Could we set up a call for later this week?
3. Prepare a proposal to present in your meeting. Include the specific arrangement you'd ideally like (for example, working from home three days per week), your reasoning for the request and the professional and work-related (not personal) benefits of a hybrid arrangement, and details or scenarios for your potential schedule and communication with the team.
4. Practice your pitch until you feel confident delivering it, and prepare responses to possible questions your manager might have. Try to anticipate their concerns or worries ahead of time, and brainstorm ideas to divert any pushback you might receive.
5. If you don't receive a "yes" right away, you might want to ask your manager what concerns they have, and then think of ways to address those. Consider asking to revisit the subject three or six months from now, or propose a trial run where you can demonstrate how the arrangement would work.



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Over the last year, remote work has proven itself to be a smart, strategic, and sustainable option for millions. As more companies embrace remote work for the long-term, I fully expect that the number of jobs that can be performed from anywhere will continue to grow as well. If you see remote work as a key part of your professional future, now is the time to make it happen for yourself.



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"Despite new norms around flexible work environments, inclusive work spaces and habits still deserve consideration."

BY FRANK WEISHAAPT

A Hybrid Office Will Require New Routines. Here's How To Get It Right

Businesses across the globe have come a long way in embracing the digital office over the past year, since work-from-home became the standard for nonessential companies. Even before the pandemic, I championed the concept of the "modern" working environment and embraced the hybrid office (half in-office, half remote).

In the new normal, more offices will need to move to a hybrid model, not just to cut down on the number of people in a given space at one time, but because we're all experiencing the perks of remote work, which is something employees across the board will expect after the threat of the pandemic subsides.

With vaccines becoming more readily available across the country, the prospect of returning to the office is becoming a reality. Many people are anxious and ready to get back into the office in some shape or form. However, we must do it responsibly. We must ensure that we empower workers as they return, as well as those who continue working remotely indefinitely.



STRONGER WI-FI AND MORE DIGITAL STORAGE SPACE

It's a familiar routine: We're in the middle of making a great point in a team meeting on a video call when someone says, "Oh by the way, you're frozen," or "I think you lost connection." Despite this uncomfortable circumstance, video calls are likely here to stay; connectivity will be crucial to ensure high-quality video calls can occur for internal and external meetings.

Internet companies stepped up at the beginning of the pandemic, particularly for students forced into remote learning environments. Operations teams need to work hand in hand to make sure their current packages will be able to support the office's new needs, and if not, find alternative packages that will power their teams.

Businesses such as Google Drive and Dropbox were already touting cloud technology. Now, storage and asset management will continue being important investments, even when our teams return to the office.

While many were already familiar with these systems and leveraging them on a day-to-day basis, not everyone will be in the office at the same time, due to the hybrid workplace and more flexible work conditions. After a year of working remotely, our cloud organizational drives have seen more files uploaded than ever—and this trend is likely to continue.

These investments will create a solid infrastructure for teams to work in the office, at home, or anywhere.



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ADJUSTING THE PREVIOUS STATE OF WORKFLOWS

While digital workflows have been top of mind, now that the return to office is more imminent, our in-office workflows will need a reboot. As a key priority for most offices and businesses, operations teams will look to upgrade current spaces, making them safe and effective for the hybrid workforce.

After a year-plus of remote work, operations teams will be tasked with reconfiguring office layouts: where desks are located, making sure employees have enough room to feel comfortable returning to the office, looking at office soft spaces, and providing team members with spaces to connect safely.

With hybrid work, offices will need to bring in some of the aspects of remote work that employees now appreciate and expect. These include embracing some of the benefits of working from home such as bringing in more standing desks and incorporating more flexible spaces for phone calls and personal matters, while fostering focus.

MORE COLLABORATIVE AND EVOLVED CONFERENCE ROOMS

Conference rooms will experience a major makeover. While the future of the workforce is hybrid, conference rooms will still play a larger role than they did in the pre-pandemic office.

The reality is that not everyone will be in the office all at once, owing to safety reasons, but also due to the fact that people now want a more flexible lifestyle.

Of course, hybrid teams will still need meetings and group calls to feel inclusive and, in turn, productive. Conference rooms will need to be laid out differently, just like our common spaces and desks, to ensure that teams have space be-



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tween each other on calls. This might include having fewer seats at a larger table, or having one larger table and smaller tables in the room too.

This will also mean our video solutions will need to accommodate these new structures. Conference rooms should be equipped with high-quality video cameras, microphones, and speakers to provide accurate and seamless tech experiences to those taking meetings in and out of the office. These solutions will increase the level of productivity and efficiency by eliminating technical issues; they will also enhance the quality of experience for employees, making them still feel included, even when working remotely.

The modern workplace is still something we're creating, finding solutions that will make work-from-anywhere as effortless as possible. But operations teams, office managers, and HR will be the driving force behind this shift, powering the hybrid workplace.