

It's a whole new **New** **Normal** - welcome back!

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Quarantines, lockdowns, government and self-imposed isolation, fear, anxiety, and many other factors have pushed tens of millions worldwide to work from home. The result has been a more urgent re-examination of the pros and cons of remote work.

The great divide between those who can and cannot work from home

The financial and personal impact of the pandemic often depends on the answer to one fundamental question: **Can I work from home, or am I tethered to my workplace?**

- The potential for remote work is concentrated among highly-skilled, highly educated workers in a handful of industries, occupations, and geographies.
- Studies now indicate that about 20% of the workforce could work remotely three to five days a week and remain effective and efficient.
- If that potential were reached, it would profoundly impact urban economies, transportation, and consumer spending, among other things.
- On the other hand, more than half the workforce has little or no opportunity for remote work. Some of the jobs that mandate in-person participation are low paid.

...to working from home



From a busy workplace...

The impact of COVID-19 on the traditional workplace has created a pivotal point in irreversible change.

Hybrid appears to be here for the long term

How long will remote work persist? Company executives have indicated in surveys that hybrid models of remote work for some employees may be here to stay. The pandemic has broken through cultural and technological barriers that prevented remote work in the past, creating a massive shift for many workers.

The break between work and home

Working from home has removed the separation that going to the office provided. Many thrive with this separation. People often said going to the office



gave them a place to forget about what was going on at home and vice-versa. For remote work to succeed, individuals must learn to separate work from personal and focus on the task at hand without distractions.

The pandemic has given people an opportunity to soul search and become more internally focused. Goals have shifted and are more introspective. The double-edged sword is that now people are more in touch with what they want from their employers and personal relationships, and we are anticipating a wave of job changes and climbing divorce rates. (Divorce rates during the pandemic are up by 34%.)

At the society level, remote work has potential disadvantages

One such weakness is the prospect of isolation and exclusion. Some suggest that extending remote work could create an 'Autistic Society,' in which people are detached from each other and suffer from communication problems. The two main syndromes of autism parallel problems with remote work:

- extreme isolation from human contact
- anxiety around the surrounding physical environment and the possibility it could change

Knowledge transfer and remote work

One of the challenges in the pandemic has been the transfer of knowledge and building skills. Pre-pandemic, the supervisor was there to ensure positive work habits were being formed and followed. The supervisor could answer questions immediately. Junior staff learned ways of doing things by modelling senior staff.

In the pandemic environment, this transfer of knowledge has become more challenging.

The initial reduction of distractions and increased productivity that came with working from home was welcomed. However, at the senior level, those very distractions contributed to the senior leaders' feelings of self-worth. The need to feel needed is an important consideration.

Studies have long shown that frequent in-person interactions lead to commitment, support, and cooperation among people on teams. Nothing can beat the value of face-to-face contact.



Self-leadership and autonomy are positive aspirations, but only possible when one has experience in the job. Without it, self-leadership, internal motivation, self-control, and self-influence all suffer.

Learning how to manage remote work can decrease the perception of family-work conflict. By supporting employees' time management and self-leadership skills, organizations can help them give each world the right attention at the right time. As we continue to emerge from the pandemic and move toward hybrid workforces, managers, HR, and employees will need to consider family-work conflict, social isolation, and distracting work environments, as potential obstacles.

The new found knowledge surrounding job autonomy and self-leadership skills will be a potential enabler of successful work from home arrangements. The way in which work is designed must shift so production goals are more apparent and self-management skills will be vital.

