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Thinking about working from home permanently? It may introduce new challenges while solving others

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As businesses consider safely reopening, companies have been awakened to the possibilities of working from home on a larger scale. Necessity is the mother of invention, but moving the workplace to a home office setting permanently may introduce new challenges while solving others.

I like to dine out. But even with some restaurants reopening, I'm not sure I'm ready to return to my favorite places. So, as I write, I am waiting for the local fish lady from Shore to Door Fish Market in Coconut Grove to deliver a fresh catch from the Keys. At dinner, my family and I may discuss when it's right to depend less on her while also considering when it's best to return to our traditional workplaces. Like our dinner, it's not a decision to rush nor an easy one to make. We all want out.

We've learned we may need less real estate to keep business operations running. Depending on the type of company, a hybrid work model may be coming for some. Flex hours, common practice on the West Coast, can be used, with some expected to come into the office at certain times and other times working from home. But that is not an option for everyone. Just ask someone on a production line, driving a delivery vehicle, frontline medical workers, or many other essential employees.

As this tale of two cities approaches — with those who can shift easily to working from home doing so, and those who can't continuing to brave the outside world — let's consider what the new workplace may look like and if it's right for your business.

There are numerous examples and studies showing increased productivity while working from home (the environment also does better). But, I am not sure I concur. Some companies like Box liked the change so much that they're allowing employees to [work-from-home until 2021](#). Twitter and Square are offering to make that option [permanent](#). [Shopify](#) is even paying for work-from-home supplies. But will this really work? In 2017, IBM had many employees working from home but ultimately brought them back into the office. The same was true at Yahoo!

Remember, company teams were frozen in amber when the pandemic hit, with most hiring coming to a standstill. Company culture at these businesses was already established, but as time goes on, new personnel will need to be nurtured to understand company culture, something work-from-home may not be as well suited for. We may also become less tolerant of awkward moments with children, pets and unsuspecting relatives making unwanted, often comedic cameos on Zoom chats.

Networking and developing the relationships successful companies need to grow, survive and pivot is also hard to accomplish working from home. Being out and about helps. It also takes looking beyond productivity statistics to identify potential company leaders adept at the social interaction and teambuilding that leadership requires.

There's a difference between the salesperson tasked with building and maintaining relationships with customers and clients, and the techie who can tackle a problem remotely. Plus, have you ever tried mentoring via a computer? Also, working from home, for some, can be isolating, causing negative mental health effects.

We don't know for sure when a vaccine will be ready, if we can achieve herd immunity, whether our own antibodies can keep us safe, or for how long. It's a waiting game. Right now, for many, working from home is not a choice. Take advantage of this time to find out what works best for your company. It is probably too soon to set a permanent policy, but tinkering with different workforce models may prove fruitful.

I love the fish lady's offerings, but I love dining out, too. Maybe in the future, I will enjoy a little bit of both. But I haven't made a decision yet on the right course moving forward, and when it comes to your business, neither should you.

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