Working from Home

Lessons Learned over the Last Seven Months
July Is the New January: More Companies Delay Return to the Office

• From Ford to Microsoft, companies are increasingly extending working from home through next summer.
• Google was one of the first to announce that July 2021 was its return-to-office date.
• Uber, Slack and Airbnb soon jumped on the bandwagon.
• In the past week, Microsoft, Target, Ford Motor and The New York Times said they, too, had postponed the return of in-person work to next summer and acknowledged the inevitable: The pandemic isn’t going away anytime soon.
• “I hope this will offer the flexibility you need to balance work with taking care of yourselves and your loved ones over the next 12 months,” Google’s chief executive, Sundar Pichai, wrote in an email to employees about the July 2021 date.

Microsoft Blog: Embracing a flexible workplace

... the pandemic has raised questions about what our employees can expect in the future, so we provided some guidance this week to employees on our thinking about work flexibility. Flexibility can mean different things to each of us, and we recognize there is no one-size-fits-all solution given the variety of roles, work requirements and business needs we have at Microsoft.

Our guidance includes:

- **Work site (the physical space where you work, e.g. office, center, home, mobile):** We recognize that some employees are required to be onsite and some roles and businesses are better suited for working away from the worksite than others. However, for most roles, we view working from home part of the time (less than 50%) as now standard – assuming manager and team alignment.

- **Work hours (the hours and days when employees work, e.g. workday start and end times, full- or part-time):** Work schedule flexibility is now considered standard for most roles. While part-time continues to be subject to manager approval, our guidance is meant to facilitate an open conversation between a manager and employee regarding considerations.

- **Work location (the geographic location where you work, e.g. city and country):** Similarly the guidance is there for managers and employees to discuss and address considerations such as role requirements, personal tax, salary, expenses, etc.
Attitudes Regarding Returning to the Office

Survey Results

Are you afraid to go back to the office when it reopens?

If your office is still closed, how likely is that you will go back when it re-opens?

How confident are you that your colleagues will follow safety guidelines?

Yes/Highly Likely
No/Somewhat likely
Not likely

The Korn Ferry survey of 1,329 professionals took place in late September 2020.

Are you more productive working from home (even if there are distractions such as a spouse or children) or from the office?

Cisco Systems

• Nearly 9 of 10 workers say they want more flexibility and autonomy over where and when they work, according to new research from technology company Cisco Systems. Cisco Vice President Gordon Thomson told Reuters that companies must reconfigure how they operate to help meet the new demands of workers, prioritizing effective communication and collaboration.
Key Findings from Cisco’s October 2020 Report

• Working from Home the New Normal
  • 58% will work 8 or more days each month from home (Post-COVID)
  • 98% of meetings will include participants joining from home (post-COVID)
  • 98% share frustrations with video meetings when working from home

• Employees Uncomfortable Returning to the Office
  • 97% of employees want changes to make them feel safer at work
  • 99% of companies are planning sweeping changes to the workplace as a result of COVID-19
  • 94% of companies say technology would benefit them by providing a safer work environment

• Hybrid Work Environment
  • 77% of larger organizations will increase work flexibility while 53% will shrink office sizes
  • 89% of employees cite frustrations with in-office experiences
  • 96% indicate they need intelligent workplace technology to improve work environments

THE RISE OF THE HYBRID WORKPLACE A Global Survey of Executives, Employee Experience Experts, and Knowledge Workers
Commuter Connections Survey

62% of Worksites With a Telework Program/Policy Made Changes to Accommodate the Pandemic – Most Made a Change to Expand Telework Eligibility

- Allowed more employees to TW/eased restrictions on who could TW: 46%
- Increased hours/days employees could TW: 5%
- Other TW changes: 11%
- No changes/not sure: 38%

4,539 Employers were contacted in May and June 2020 and 180 responded for a 4% response rate.
51% of survey respondents indicate that they have been more productive working from home during COVID-19, and 95% of respondents say productivity has been higher or the same while working remotely. And though there are many reasons why performance has improved (in spite of the stresses of the pandemic), some of the top reasons respondents gave for their increased productivity include:

- Fewer interruptions (68%)
- More focused time (63%)
- Quieter work environment (68%)
- More comfortable workplace (66%)
- Avoiding office politics (55%)

This improved productivity may help explain why 61% of workers review remote work more positively and why 50% also say their employer views remote work favorably now.

Many respondents also said that their personal lives have improved while working at home. Most respondents cited the lack of commuting (79%) as a reason why their lives were better, with another 72% enjoying the lack of commuting costs. Given that 36% of respondents reported round trip commutes of two or more hours, it’s not surprising that the “found time” has made workers happier, more productive employees.

Another 73% said that they had a better work-life balance thanks to working at home. The additional balance gave them:

• More time with their family/children (46%)
• More time with their partner (42%)
• The ability to take care of their pet(s) (37%)

FlexJobs Survey

• **65% of respondents want to become full-time remote employees post-pandemic, while 31% would prefer a hybrid work arrangement**, with some of the days at home and some of the days in the office.

• Thirty percent of respondents aren’t waiting for the pandemic to end to make the switch. They’ve already requested to **continue their remote work arrangement post-pandemic**—and have been approved! Another 27% of workers said that the ability to work at home as much as they want is so important to them that they are willing to take a 10% to 20% pay cut to have that benefit.

• For all the positives that remote work has brought, there are people who miss the office. Specifically, 49% of those surveyed said they miss seeing their colleagues, with 14% saying they miss water cooler chats, and 11% reporting they were lonely. Another 7% cited “distracted” as a reason for missing the office, while 12% worried about the impact remote work would have on their career. Finally, 20% of workers say they find it difficult to “unplug” when they work from home.

• However, 37% of respondents said that they miss “nothing” about the office, and only 4% would prefer to return to the traditional office full-time.

Seasonal Affective Disorder and Teleworking

Seasonal Affective Disorder impacts about 5% of adults in the United States, according to the American Psychiatric Association. It’s most prevalent in the fall and winter months; shorter days, less sunshine, and cold weather forcing people indoors is what typically leads to symptoms of SAD; the Mayo Clinic says “If you're like most people with SAD, your symptoms start in the fall and continue into the winter months, sapping your energy and making you feel moody.”

Teleworking and SAD

• Remotely working won’t help you treat these symptoms. But because your schedule is more flexible, you have more opportunities to seek professional help or attend to self-care. You can also avoid the temptation to eat unhealthy office snacks by filling your home with nutritious foods that can improve your mood. You can also add a lightbox to your home office to reduce SAD symptoms and increase your energy without distracting anyone else.

• While working from home this winter can help make you more productive, it’s only effective if you stick to a consistent routine. Wake up at a consistent time, establish working hours, and act like you’re actually going to work (i.e., showering and getting dressed). What’s more, make sure that your calendars are synched so you don’t miss any important deadlines, events, or meetings you need to call in for.

“Instead of approaching this winter season with fear and trepidation and dread, we just need to prepare ourselves as much as possible,” says Jeff Gardere, board-certified clinical psychologist and associate professor at Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine in New York City.

- **Wake up at a normal time**
- **Get some light** - Turn on your lights first thing in the morning because light exposure will signal to your brain that it’s time to wake up, Gardere says. Plus, the lack of natural light in colder months is one of the main contributors to seasonal affective disorder (or “SAD”), a type of depression that typically occurs each year during fall and winter. And exposure to artificial light from lamps can be just as beneficial to the brain as natural sunlight.
- **Find a way to be comfortable outdoors** - Outdoor activities are safer than ones held indoors, because there’s more air flow and space to maintain social distance. For those who live in parts of the U.S. where it gets cold in the winter, make sure you have the supplies you need to comfortably gather outdoors, such as cold-weather clothing, Gardere says. “Get excited about your winter gear,” he says. If you have access to outdoor space, consider an outdoor heater or blankets.
- **Plus, prep your indoors** - Since you’re going to be inside more than usual, it’s important that you “refashion your environment” to better suit your needs.
- **Exercise — no, really** - Gardere says he uses an indoor cycling bike every morning because it gets neurotransmitters flowing that help your mood and focus, such as endorphins, dopamine and serotonin.
- **Find a hobby** - Winter might be a good time to pick up a hobby, or an activity that you know can keep you entertained, Gardere says. Whether it’s baking or completing crossword puzzles, studies suggest that when people have hobbies, they tend to be less stressed, more focused and less likely to experience burnout.

FlexJobs and Mental Health America Survey

• For the more than half of employed Americans working from home during the pandemic—many of whom had previously been in an office—the sudden switch to remote work wasn’t without its challenges. From having to quickly get up to speed on remote technology to navigating a very new work-life balance, the transition was anything but easy.

• FlexJobs partnered with Mental Health America (MHA) to conduct a survey of more than 1,500 respondents to check in on how people are faring mentally at work during these unprecedented times.
Employed workers are more than 3x as likely to report poor mental health now versus before the pandemic.
Mental health as a whole is suffering since the start of the pandemic, but stress is of particular concern to workers. Of employed workers, 42% say their stress levels are currently high or very high, while 47% of those who are unemployed report high stress levels. The top stressors for respondents include:

- COVID-19
- Personal finances
- Current events
- Concern over their family’s health
- Economy
- Job responsibilities
FlexJobs and Mental Health America Survey

While only 51% of workers say they have the emotional support they need at work to help manage their stress, they do believe there are ways employers can help staff navigate workplace stress and support mental health.

• For 56% of respondents, having flexibility in their workday was overwhelmingly listed as the top way their workplace could better support them.

• Encouraging time off and offering mental health days were tied for second and third at 43%.

• 28% felt that increased PTO and better health insurance were the next best ways to provide support.
In the sixth year of our Women in the Workplace study, conducted in partnership with LeanIn.Org, we find that the effects of the COVID-19 crisis have exacerbated gender disparities and their implications for women at work, especially for mothers, female senior leaders, and Black women across America.

In addition to being laid off and furloughed at higher rates than their male counterparts during the pandemic, women are—notably, for the first time in our research on the topic—considering downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce altogether at staggering rates.

Many companies need to do more to address challenges employees are facing during COVID-19.

Consistent feelings at work in past few months, % of employees

1Question: In the last few months, which of the following have you consistently felt at work?

Sources: Women in the Workplace 2020, LeanIn.Org and McKinsey, 2020
While all parents are under enormous strain, generally speaking, mothers are bearing a greater burden than fathers, as they are disproportionately expected to fulfill household and caregiving responsibilities during the workweek. Moreover, 41% of mothers say they must hide their caregiving struggles from their colleagues.

### Impact of Covid-19 on parents' work routine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have had to modify my work routine to adapt to my caregiving responsibilities</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I work outside of core hours to balance other family responsibilities</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>55%</td>
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https://www.catalyst.org/research/impact-covid-working-parents/
Harvard Business Review Research Indicates

• Millions around the globe have made a sudden transition to remote work amid the COVID-19 pandemic. What employers should be concerned about is a longer-term risk: employee burnout.

• Research has shown that workers often unintentionally make it hard for their supervisors, colleagues, and employees to maintain boundaries. In five studies involving more than 2,000 working adults, we found that senders of after-hours work emails underestimate how compelled receivers feel to respond right away, even when such emails are not urgent.

https://hbr.org/2020/04/3-tips-to-avoid-wfh-burnout
Red Flag Warnings

Burnout Red Flag #1: Avoiding Work
Burnout Red Flag #2: Declining Performance
Burnout Red Flag #3: Apathy or Exhaustion
Burnout Red Flag #4: Inability to Disconnect


What can Employers, Managers, and Coworkers do to help one another cope?

- Maintain physical and social boundaries
- Maintain temporal boundaries as much as possible
- Focus on your most important work

https://hbr.org/2020/04/tips-to-avoid-wfh-burnout
Burnout Busters

• **Set Office Hours** - Implement office hours by silencing notifications and activating an out-of-office response outside of certain time blocks. This way, no matter if you’re on the road or on the couch, your brain (and your clients or coworkers) knows that it’s time for you to relax.

• **Take Time Off** - A little counteraction goes a long way. Refresh your clarity and enthusiasm for work by stepping away from it for a little while. Whether you decide to travel or just enjoy some time at home, make sure that you completely unplug. Turn off all notifications (or even your entire device – gasp!), forward your inbox and tasks to a co-worker or virtual assistant while you’re away, and make a rule to not talk or think about work at all. After a few days, you’ll feel recharged and ready for action.

Burnout Busters

• **Have a Hobby** Intense work needs to be balanced with intense play. If work is the only thing that you feel passionate about, it’s time to discover other parts of your personality.

• **Update Your Job Description** If you’re feeling stuck in a rut, steer yourself out of it. Schedule a meeting with your supervisor or mentor to discuss what you do and don’t like about your current role, and brainstorm ways that it could be updated to better cater to your strengths and interests.

• **Tell Your Team** Hiding your concerns will only make them worse. If you’re feeling burned out, tell your boss and coworkers as early as possible.

Zoom Fatigue is Real

If you’re finding that you’re more exhausted at the end of your workday than you used to be, you’re not alone. Over the past few weeks, mentions of “Zoom fatigue” have popped up more and more on social media, and Google searches for the same phrase have steadily increased since early March.

Zoom fatigue is sneaky and can be triggered in people just like you who spend copious amounts of time on virtual meetings, trying to compensate for the loss of face to face interaction.

https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue
Why are Video Calls so Draining?

In part, it’s because they force us to focus more intently on conversations in order to absorb information.

The problem isn’t helped by the fact that video calls make it easier than ever to lose focus.

“Zoom fatigue” stems from how we process information over video. On a video call the only way to show we’re paying attention is to look at the camera.

If we are with several people online at the same time, we are simultaneously processing visual cues from all of those people in a way we never have to do around a conference table.

https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue
## Techniques to Combat Zoom Fatigue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Take</th>
<th>Take a few moments before clicking “Start” to settle and ground your attention.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take</td>
<td>Take the time to truly greet whoever is in the room with your full attention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce</td>
<td>Reduce onscreen stimuli.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose</td>
<td>Choose “speaker view.” In Zoom, one can choose Speaker View or Gallery View, you might opt for Speaker View so that the one person who is speaking has more of your attention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block</td>
<td>Block self-view feature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resist</td>
<td>Resist the urge to multitask. Try to take measured breaks between sessions. Build in breaks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make</td>
<td>Make virtual social events opt-in.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

[Links](https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue)  
[Links](https://www.mindful.org/zoom-exhaustion-is-real-here-are-six-ways-to-find-balance-and-stay-connected)  
[Links](https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/351091#:~:text=To%20combat%20the%20Zoom%20fatigue%2C%20smoothly%20and%20the%20last%20one.)
Techniques to Combat Zoom Fatigue (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Switch</th>
<th>Switch to phone calls or email.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>For external calls, avoid defaulting to video, especially if you don’t know each other well</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create</td>
<td>Create an itinerary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switch up</td>
<td>Switch up your set up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remind</td>
<td>Remind yourself periodically that this is a new place between presence and absence that we will have to learn how to accommodate as we go forward into the uncertain future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let</td>
<td>Let’s see if we can simultaneously refrain from high expectations without dismissing the clear benefits of online communication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue
https://www.mindful.org/zoom-exhaustion-is-real-here-are-six-ways-to-find-balance-and-stay-connected
https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/351091#:~:text=To%20combat%20the%20Zoom%20fatigue%2C%20smoothly%20as%20the%20last%20one.
Ideas for to Boost Morale and Collaboration

- Birthday celebrations
- Water cooler get togethers
- Virtual ice-breakers
- Virtual Town Hall, detailing same and having a Q and A
- Weekly small group chats, communication weekly with company personnel
- Managers check in, happy hours, pet days, and more virtually
- T-shirts, Incentive PTO, remote worker games, remote happy hours, weekly leadership team meetings, regular employee communications, saying thank you very often and being visible

* Survey of over 150 executives, in-house attorneys, and HR professionals from clients of the law firm Blank Rome. The responses came from C-suite executives, in-house attorneys, and human resources professionals from a diverse array of businesses across various industries and geographies conducted from April 18 to April 24, 2020.
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Contact

• Elham Shirazi
• elham@e-planning.com
• 213.248.0030
• Kingcounty.gov/worksmart