

POINT/COUNTERPOINT: Remote work. Here to stay, or time to go away?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Remote work, also called work from home, work from anywhere, telework, remote job, mobile work, and distance work is an employment arrangement in which employees do not commute to a central place of work. The COVID-19 pandemic thrust much of the workforce into an environment where remote work, once considered a "perk," was now the "new normal" for many.

In October 2020, 71 percent of U.S. workers who had jobs that could be done remotely were, in fact, working from home, according to a Pew Research Center survey. By February 2022, that figure had declined to 59 percent.

As we continue to emerge into this post-pandemic work world now, does working remotely continue to work? Or should employees be back in the office? Here's what corporate leaders throughout the country are saying.

JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon: In a story first published at Fortune.com, Dimon ripped remote work and Zoom as "management by Hollywood Squares" and said returning to the office will aid diversity. He called the office a "rainbow room" and said that workers who stayed home were denying themselves "opportunities to meet other people." Dimon further noted that working from home "doesn't work for people who want to hustle, doesn't work for culture, doesn't work for idea generation."

Dimon also shared with CNBC his belief that remote working removed possibilities of collaboration and osmotic learning. "I mean most of us learn by an apprenticeship system, by seeing mistakes, going (on) trips, how to handle a client, how do you handle the problem. It's hard to inculcate culture and character and all those things.

It's very hard to build and develop a deeper relationship on Zoom," he said.

Goldman Sachs CEO David Solomon: "I do think for a business like ours, which is an innovative, collaborative apprenticeship culture, this is not ideal for us," noted Solomon when asked for his thoughts on working remotely. "And it's not a new normal. It's an aberration that we're going to correct as soon as possible."

Netflix Co-Founder and Co-CEO Reed Hastings: In an interview with the Wall Street Journal, Hastings said about remote work, "No, I don't see any positives. Not being able to get together in person, particularly internationally, is a pure negative."

Tesla's Elon Musk: Musk has also notably weighed in on the negatives of remote work, as first leaked in a memo to staff back in late May. An email shared by a Tesla shareholder noted Musk stating, "Remote work is no longer acceptable. Anyone who wishes to do remote work must be in the office for a minimum (and I mean *minimum*) of 40 hours per week or depart Tesla." Musk has since confirmed the email's content as he continues to publicly condemn the practice of working from home or otherwise remotely.

Upwork CEO Hayden Brown: On the flip side, seeing remote work as a positive in the workplace and worth continuing, Brown said, "I can't tell you the number of CEOs I talked to who are thinking, 'I have to solve the diversity challenge in my business, and remote work is one of the key tools. We have to let go of this very office-centric culture and incorporate people

who are in a lot of geographies."

IBM Chief Human Resources Officer Diane Gherson: Also noting the positives, Gherson said, "We are seeing acceleration of the trend to democratize the workplace. Digital technology has flattened hierarchies, with everyone connected and getting information at the same time, and so many channels for employee input and involvement in decision-making in real time."

Unilever CEO Alan Jope: CEO Alan Jope has called a traditional five-day office work week "old fashioned" and Unilever announced in January that workers will only come to the office occasionally for social purposes and to catch up together. "We anticipate never going back to five days a week in the office," Jope said. This follows a headline-grabbing experiment at Unilever New Zealand, where workers were paid full salaries to work four days a week.

Nielsen Corporation CEO and Chief Diversity Officer David Kenny: Kenny recently shared more of a "hybrid vision" of remote work. In an interview with Madison Wells Executive Recruiting, Kenny said that his company is converting their New York offices to team meeting spaces for employees to gather once or twice a week.

And in a recent interview with the New York Times, Kenny further

noted, "If you are coming and working at your desk, you certainly could do that from home. We have leases that are coming due, and it's absolutely driving those kinds of decisions."

Apple CEO Tim Cook recently issued a company memo, saying that its Bay Area workers would be expected to work from their company offices three days a week starting Sept. 5. On Aug. 22, NBC News reported on the response from workers at Apple to this memo detailing Apple's return to work plan. A petition has been launched online by Apple Together, a group of workers from throughout the company that identifies itself as a global solidarity union.

The NBC News story detailed some of the petition's verbiage, including commentary from the workers who have launched it: "This uniform mandate from senior leadership does not consider the unique demands of each job role nor the diversity of individuals," the petition argues. "Those asking for more flexible arrangements have many compelling reasons and circumstances: from disabilities (visible or not); family care; safety, health, and environmental concerns; financial considerations; to just plain being happier and more productive."

Undoubtedly, this conversation will continue in the months ahead as companies evaluate and determine what works best for their employees, and for their bottom line.



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