

Flexibility vs. Focus: The Remote Work Dilemma

Some mornings, I feel like I've already lived an entire day before I even sit down to start work. I'll pack lunch, toss in a load of laundry, reply to a few texts, maybe scroll a little too long on Instagram — and then finally open my laptop, hoping to lock in and be productive. But the truth is, working from home can blur the line between “work” and “life” in ways that are both convenient and exhausting.

Like a lot of people, I've gotten a taste of different work environments. As I look into my future, I think, *What do I want for my future work environment?* This has had me circling back to one question: Are we more productive when we work from home, or does it just feel like it?

Remote work has become the norm in so many industries — tech, marketing, finance, freelance — and for good reason. It saves time, reduces commutes and gives people more control over their schedules. I've definitely enjoyed the flexibility it offers. I can say, “I'm sick, can't come into the office but I'll get the project done at home.” But it's not always the productivity miracle people make it out to be.

Yes, there are fewer office distractions when you're working from your bedroom or kitchen table. But there are different distractions: laundry that piles up, family that want to chat, errands you think you can squeeze in “really quick.” The day stretches on, but somehow, your to-do list doesn't shrink as fast as you'd hoped.

There's also the issue of boundaries. A Harvard Business Review study found that 46% of remote workers end up working longer hours than they would in a traditional office. I've felt that. It's easy to log back on after dinner or respond to an email at 12 a.m. just because your workspace is always right there. And when you're always “on,” burnout isn't far behind.

Take Jackie Quarnberg, who's been working from home for more than 10 years. She told me she loves the flexibility, especially being there for her kids, but admits it's hard to turn off the work side of her brain.

“I'll answer an email while I'm helping my kids with homework,” she said. “Or check a task list while waiting for my daughter at dance. The work never stops.”

That constant overlap can drain your energy — not just physically, but mentally. You're always juggling, always context-switching, and it adds up.

Then there's the team dynamic. One of the biggest things I've noticed (and research backs this up) is how different collaboration feels remotely. According to McKinsey & Company, 69% of remote and hybrid employees say they struggle more with collaboration than those in the office. I've experienced that too — Zoom meetings, endless Slack messages, waiting on replies that could've been quick hallway convos in an office. There is no space for the spontaneous collaboration or brainstorm ideas that come from stopping at a coworker's desk.

Those small in-person interactions — chatting before a meeting, brainstorming over lunch — can lead to big ideas. And without them, collaboration feels more like a chore than a spark. Creativity starts to stall. Connection fades. It's not that remote work is bad, it just changes how we interact — and that can come at a cost.

Disengagement is another problem. Gallup reports that 32% of remote workers feel disengaged, compared to 20% of their in-office peers. It's easy to see why. When you're not surrounded by coworkers or plugged into a team culture, it's harder to stay motivated. You might be sitting at your desk, but mentally? Checked out.

Of course, this isn't a one-sided issue. Remote work does have real upsides. Another Harvard Business Review study found that remote workers were 13% more productive. Gallup found 54% of remote employees reported higher job satisfaction. I've felt that too — being able to control my schedule, wear comfy clothes and skip commuting? Amazing.

But even those benefits don't tell the whole story. According to Owl Labs, 39% of employees still believe the office is the best place for innovation and brainstorming. It's not about choosing one over the other — it's about finding balance.

Personally, I think the hybrid model makes the most sense. It gives people flexibility when they need it while still creating space for in-person connection and collaboration. It's not about going back to the old way — it's about building a better way forward.

The next step? Show up. Not every day, not all the time — but sometimes. Because as great as flexibility is, focus, creativity and community still matter just as much.

About the Author:

Brooklynn is a junior at Brigham Young University studying Public Relations with a minor in Information Systems. She has an interest in strategic communication and its application in companies. With hands-on experience in PR campaigns and digital engagement, Brooklynn enjoys exploring how real-world applications of PR principles shape the industry.