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The New Normal: Remote Only

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3-4 minutes

COVID forced upon us work from home (WFH). And now we get to see the results ...

Our companies are operating as well as, and in some cases better than, they were when we were all together in an office. Pull requests are getting completed at about the same rate. Customer call tickets are getting closed at about the same rate. NPS scores are about the same.

From the team member's perspective, going to an in person office incurs significant unproductive commute time, and robs us of the ability to see and connect with our families each day.

Why go back to that world, when remote-only is working so well? The answer is ... many won't. Many will choose to work where remote-only is the norm, allowing them to do the work they want and live where they want ... for a fraction of what they are paying for housing and living cost now.

From the CEO's perspective, having in person offices limits us to the talent pool in that particular physical geography. In the case of San Francisco, that means paying up to 3x for a particular skill-set compared to other parts of the world. And to add insult to injury, office space is usually the second largest expense line item (just after payroll).

Why go back to that world, when remote-only is working so well? The answer is ... many won't. Many will choose to stay all-remote and start hiring the best talent no matter where in the world it is located ... for a fraction of what they are paying for that talent now.

This is the new normal, with or without COVID. Do you want to be competitive in this new world? Get really good at remote work. It's here to stay.

Photo credit: Flexjobs.com

There are of course exceptions to every rule. There are a percentage of the workforce who crave the in person interaction of the office, primarily extroverts who want the social interaction and creatives who want the visual and emotional collaboration. But the surprise will be just how few those are.

Many CEOs who make this shift to remote work will be tempted to go with a hybrid approach: a main office with the option to be remote. Don't do it.

The companies that I coach have experimented with all three models:

1. In person (one or several offices)
2. Remote only
3. Hybrid (physical offices with option to be remote)

And they list them in that order in terms of effectiveness. If you are going to be remote at all, be remote-only. Hybrid creates a culture of the ins (in person) and the outs (remote), which breeds mistrust and low morale. Those in the office communicate with each other offline and therefore get lazy about fully writing all of their communications. Those who are remote therefore miss out on critical information and feel like second-class citizens.

Instead, go with remote only which forces all to write all of their communications (made available equally to all who need access) because informal in-person conversations are not an option.