



Timely Information for Personal Success

## The New Workplace: Remote Work Taking Off (Part I)

By Mike Jacquart

Like 9/11, the COVID-19 pandemic is one of those “seminal events,” the kind of crisis that leaves an indelible marker in our collective memory. The imprint has most assuredly included the working world. As employee assistance professional Bryan McNutt puts it “People will not be *returning to* work. Rather, they will likely begin an entirely *new experience of* work.”

Even before the pandemic, companies were experimenting with changes like shorter hours and work weeks as well as more **remote work**. According to Global Workplace Analytics, before the coronavirus outbreak, there were 4.3 million remote workers in the U.S., or roughly 3.2% of the entire workforce. That number *skyrocketed* when over 60% of employed Americans said they had worked from home during the crisis. (According to Gallup, this was in April.)

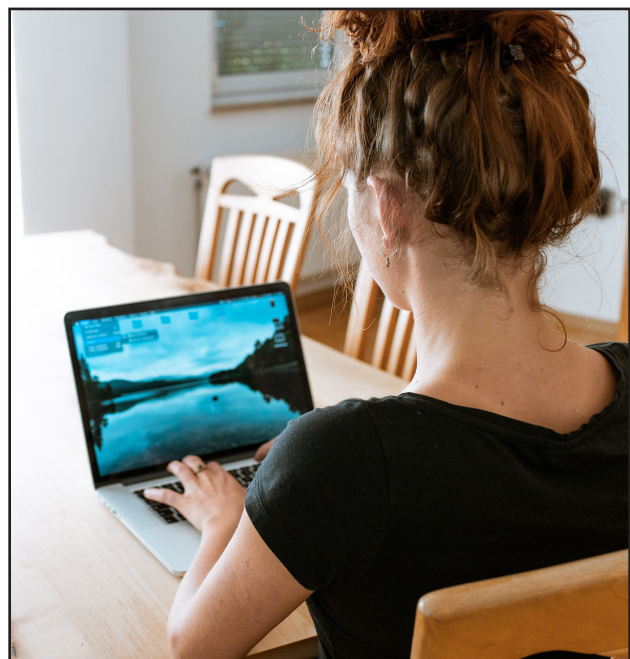
As someone who’s been working remotely *for years*, I did not find that number surprising. In fact, I wondered why it’s taken this long for this trend to really take off. This begs the question: “*Should the modern employer be less focused on providing state-of-the-art office spaces if employees would rather skip the commute and work from home?*”

### Whether to Build: A Murky Matter

“Brick-and-mortar” issues such as construction costs, office rent, etc. are a BIG consider-

ation for any business thinking about allowing more employees to skip the office commute and work from home. It used to be that if a company wanted to expand, it was almost automatically looking at building (or leasing) a bigger building. *Today this can be a murky matter*. The firm might be better off sticking with the physical size building it has and encouraging (wherever applicable) more employees to work from home. What a cost savings!

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## Healthy Recipe: Power Salad

### INGREDIENTS:

- 6 cups prepared salad
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- 2 tablespoons red onion, chopped
- ¼ cup creamy ranch dressing
- 10 cherry tomatoes
- 4 slices roast turkey breast, cut up
- 2 sliced reduced-fat Swiss cheese, cut up

### NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- Calories per serving: 180
- Protein: 21 g.
- Carbohydrates: 19 g.
- Sodium: 757 mg.
- Fat: 4 g.
- Fiber: 6 g.

### DIRECTIONS:

- ➊ Toss salad, carrots, onion, and dressing in large bowl until coated. Divide between two plates.
- ➋ Arrange tomatoes, turkey, and cheese on top of the salad.

**Serving size:** 2, about 4 cups each.

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### The New Workplace

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Here is an example. A former employer of mine leased an office suite with rent that ran \$800 a month for roughly 1,200-square-feet. When the business expanded and needed to hire a sales staff, the vacant suite next to ours of similar size was immediately rented – at a cost of \$800/month. All told, that meant my employer had to shell out \$1,600 every month above and beyond *any other bill* that came in, such as electricity and other utilities, to say nothing of payroll, which is usually the largest monthly expense for any given business. Sixteen hundred each month is not chicken feed when you're talking a small business with a narrow profit margin!

My point is those same employees would be working remotely today, and at \$800 a month, the savings would add up mighty quick! And this is just *one* example of *one* small business. I shudder to think how high expenses must be for businesses with large buildings! What's more, many employers found during the pandemic that remote work went more smoothly than they thought it would.

### Other Factors

Of course, the cost of business space, while a big factor, isn't the only one. Part of any decision about remote work needs to address what type of worker YOU are. A remote employee must be very self-

motivated and okay with having little interaction with colleagues, save for some phone calls and Zoom meetings. And what about concentration? A quiet, dedicated area to work is essential, as well as the ability to remain focused on the task at hand, just like a regular office setting. If none of these describe you, then remote work is probably not a good idea.

In addition to individual differences, the type of work the business does also needs to be taken into account. For instance, certain professions, like writing, editing and graphic design, are much more conducive to remote work than some other fields. When I started working remotely nine years ago, the only big change in my day-to-day work was that instead of being handed a paper proof, I received it electronically.

Back then, I'd run into people who were shocked when they learned I did not have to drive into an office each day. Today, that same response would barely get a stare. Times do change. ■

NEXT MONTH: Work/life balance; booming digital health.

*Mike Jacquart is the editor and publisher of "Employee Assistance Report" and he edits the "Journal of Employee Assistance" for EAPA. He has been writing about employee assistance topics and trends since 2004.*