

How COVID Is Changing the State of Work



Are you ready to return to normal yet?

If “normal” means life without COVID, we’re not that far away from herd immunity. But if your definition of normal is getting back to how things used to be before the pandemic, I’m afraid that likely isn’t happening. The state of work has changed. Here’s what you need to know to prepare for life on the other side of the pandemic.

Things Have Changed. Your Business Will Need to Adapt.

If you’ve ever raised a child or owned a pet, you understand that it is very hard to allow for an exception to a rule. Try telling your dog, for instance, that they can only sit on your furniture at night. Or tell a child under 5 they can skip a nap only on vacation. Rule and exceptions to the rules are difficult to enforce when they apply *sometimes*.

The same will be true of the changes we’ve made to the workforce. Prior to COVID, many businesses didn’t want to allow employees to work from home. When the pandemic hit our doorsteps, employers were forced to reevaluate that policy. They had to make it work. All of their reasons why it would not work were tossed in order to keep the proverbial doors open.

Post pandemic, it will be difficult to return to things the way they were. It will be the same level of difficulty one might experience trying to shove all the vacation clothes back into a suitcase at the end of vacation. Things never quite fit back in the way they did when you got there.

So how will things change and what should we prepare for?

4 Ways the State of Work Has Changed

The following things have changed, and it is likely they will impact work going forward.

1. **Work at home worked.** People found a way to work from home amid the many distractions. They did what had to be done even when it was difficult. Employers found ways to measure productivity and hopefully dealt with situations that weren't working.
2. **Productivity measures changed.** Prior to the pandemic, there were many businesses that still held onto the "butts in seats" notion of productivity. People were doing their jobs as long as they were sitting in the office, even if that meant killing an extraordinary amount of time cyber shopping and surfing the internet. With COVID, employers had to look at "real" productivity. Was the job getting done? The hours mattered less because we were all juggling distractions and responsibilities from illness to childcare to home schooling. Employers were now looking at "were the business needs getting met" as an indicator of the job being performed.
3. **Have office will travel.** Prior to COVID, the business world embraced open-office culture. Some businesses even removed desk assignments from the equation and allowed employees to work anywhere (in the office) that they felt their creative best. With the pandemic, employers are having to face that people can work anywhere and have enjoyed carving out their own creative space in their homes or in the places they've been allowed to frequent. Twitter and Hitachi have already announced that they will commit to more flexible working arrangements indefinitely.
4. **Real estate is overrated.** With employees working from a non-corporate location, many employers have come to question if they need a brick-and-mortar business or if they need one big enough to house every employee. They are starting to question whether smaller buildings (or none at all) can be more cost effective. At one time, a large show of opulent office space was an indicator of success. With COVID and its effects on impressions, this is no longer the case, particularly if most of the building is empty.

We may soon hit herd immunity. And with that, there will likely be more allowances. However, the changes businesses have made during the pandemic will have ripple effects on the state of work far into the future. And just like that toddler skipping naps "only on vacation" it's likely we will never return to how things once were.

[Christina R. Metcalf](#) (formerly Green) is a marketer who enjoys using the power of story and refuses to believe meaningful copy can be written by bots. She helps chamber and small business professionals find the right words when they don't have the time or interest to do so. Christina hates exclamation points and loves road trips. Say hi on [Twitter](#) or reach out on [Facebook](#).