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Career Path: There Has Never Been a Better Time to Go Back to the Office

Skills and Professional Development



Search for "*Work from home is here to stay*" and you will find a ton of articles confirming it is so. It seems as if all the respected business journals and publications are happy to tell you that work has changed forever.

The fact that this is **what people very much want to believe** is irrelevant. For the foreseeable future, many of us who wish to work from home will be able to do so. Most of us will be as productive as we were before if not more so.

If you are interested in advancing your career, however, I say there has never been a better time to go back to the office. Rarely are we given so clear a chance to gain a competitive advantage over our peers; and relatively simply at that.

Usually it takes solid, substantive performance over the long term to have such good prospects of getting ahead. Consider this your golden opportunity.

Why? I can think of at least three reasons: management is there, your colleagues are not, and you will have many opportunities to stand out.

1. **Some number of people will continue going to the office regularly.** I predict that **senior management will be among them.** There are multiple reasons for this. Consider that important people with significant responsibilities often have offices and support staff. Some have a whole ecosystem set up to help them be productive at work. Yes, during the pandemic a certain number worked from home, but many have already returned to the office. I predict having an office at work, and needing to be in that office, will become the new status symbols in the work from home era. It is how managers will show they are important.
2. **Working from home is great, we all know it, so we want to keep doing it.** Smart people

worked out the technology for anyone to work anywhere. We can get up when we want, wear what we want, take breaks when we want. Much of the day was wasted in the office anyway. By working in focused blocks at home, we can be incredibly productive and get the same work done in less time. And best of all, the pandemic made it necessary for a lot of us. Employees were glad to push the scales back in favor of the individual in the work-life balance. Companies simply could not say no. **Many, many people will continue working from home** and there's nothing companies can do about it.

3. **Standing out in a crowd is hard.** Standing out when there are only a handful of people around is something else entirely. The casual encounter in the hallway is anything but. The invitation to join for a coffee break or a snack is your opportunity. "But," you say, "when there are fewer people around, you are at greater risk of getting assigned more work." That's exactly the point, you see. **Bosses love employees who volunteer** to take on projects. We're just trying to get the work done without drama or stress. A team member who is always cheerful, who helps often, and who isn't needy is a treasure. We will work hard to keep such an employee happy and productive.

Your bosses will be in the office. Not too many other people will be. Who comes in, and why, and what they do there will make all the difference to some careers.

When you see a colleague in the hallway and exchange a few words about a non-work topic, you have many opportunities to make a connection. Listen carefully and you find out about someone's interests. Respond thoughtfully and you can reveal shared interests.

Do not eat at your desk in some vein of thought of being productive. It is not a waste of time to have lunch with colleagues. I cannot tell you how many key business initiatives were launched by a simple ask at a casual lunch following a relaxed, shared rapport.

Is any of this fair to your colleagues who are working from home? I don't think so. Should you be worried about it? That's a personal choice you must make. I would just say that the world is filled with asymmetries of circumstances. Rather than bemoaning the unfairness of the world, you could be studying strategies that work to your advantage.

The world is competitive. If you want to outperform, be prepared to work hard, and take every advantage on offer.

The world is competitive. If you want to outperform, be prepared to work hard, and take every advantage on offer. Show up early, stay late, and volunteer to do projects no one else wants. **Always do your best and stay positive, especially when you are doing thankless tasks.** Trust me, you will stand out, now more than ever, when most people are focused on optimizing work to suit their own lives.

CAVEAT: Many of your colleagues will have a more relaxed life than you. They will work less for the same pay, and they will have less stress. They will be that much closer to a healthy work-life balance. This article provides you with career advice, which is not necessarily the same as how to live a good life or achieve satisfaction.

Be well.

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