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An article that takes the perspective of a service business and a manufacturer on the new possibility of working from home.

Life is all about choices and recently we were suddenly given limited choice when Lockdown started and we were just told to - stay at home, save lives.

So now as we enter the period of re-opening the economy - what choices do we have? One of our first choices is to work from home (WFH) or go back to the Office?

CHOICES - Work from Home or Back to working on site?

Peace

Lots of us have enjoyed the extra few minutes in bed, the ability to stumble to the laptop, comfy and happy with our cuppa. No long commutes, no rush hour traffic and no family mornings with hurried breakfasts and packed lunch frenzies with children scrambling to get to school.



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Saving Money

We have saved on fuel, school trips and perhaps even some business lunches or treats. However - is this the long-term picture for business?

We have seen many articles and stories on people who have ditched their offices and have decided to go completely remote. Saving the office overheads and long commutes.

For most of us however, life is not all about the cost savings different generations will have a different perspective on life and living in a virtual world.

Here are some thoughts on why going back to working on site may be a good move.

SPONTANEITY - Those lightbulb moments.

Service Business: Spontaneity is key to a varied and colourful life - to have to plan all our meetings and diarise every get together will no doubt put limits on our chance to have lightbulb moments that stick and become the next great team idea.

Manufacturer: Couldn't agree more – many of our best ideas come from an informal and impromptu chat or a lap of the facility/factory.

GOALS and KPIs – are we always task driven or do we need perception, feelings and visual tasks?

Service Business: Advocates of working from home say that, so long as the work gets done, what's the problem?



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Life for me is not only about goals and tasks – it is about the synergy of a team working together with a shared purpose, generating ideas and helping each other when we get challenging days.

Finding a task troublesome? the team will always help out - this cannot be replaced by slack chat. Too many people will turn to online searching to solve a problem and may well get driven down the wrong path, without the ability for other human validation.

The problem here for me with goal driven days is trust that when the goal is reached and there are more hours in the day, being at home for some means distraction and other activity. Being at work, other tasks are found and the business starts to move forward and grow, quicker – rather than waiting for the next goal or task to be provided.

Manufacturer: In some businesses and sectors, objectives can be clearer and more fixed, lending themselves to #WFH; but if some of the team are on-site and some are off-site, I don't care who you are, the people on-site will invariably do more, simply as they are on-site and if you finish one job, there is normally something else that can be done. Many days can be in a constant state of flux and as such, it is far easier to see where there is a bit of slack or time for another job/task/project that can add further value to a team or business. Also, if management are allowed to #WFH it may well lead to a 'them and us' culture, which is exactly what we are working hard at avoiding.

MENTAL HEALTH – we are basically social beings solitude and anxiety feed that voice in your head.

Service Business: Humans are social by their very nature, even those of us that are not extrovert like to interact with others and that is where we get some of our best moments to shine and become what we were meant to be.



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In my experience, #WFH days were either long and dull with a temptation to do housework or they were completely crazy, non-stop with telephones, slack chat, and moments where you dare not lose sight of the laptop for fear you miss a vital conversation.

As a business leader, keeping the faith in the team, is not always easy when you are alone and that voice in your head talks to you and fills you with anxieties. With no option to easily share – I felt my focus drifted and there were days of worry and real concern.

Manufacturer: I am fortunate to enjoy cycling and utilise my commute to get in the exercise and this helps clear the mind. #WFH does not allow this outlet for calm and reflection. Also, I do have days where working remotely or at home, I'm just all Zoomed out and crave moments of social interaction or spontaneity.

As a leader of a growing small business where you are still relied on quite a lot, it can create anxiety or even effect team morale. People can often be inspired feeding off each other's energy and in my experience, a team can enjoy seeing the boss get involved which gives an opportunity for some coaching and support throughout a team.

TEAM – diversity of individuals who see, hear and feel life work together creating synergy.

Service Business: We are all different in our own way – hence the word 'individual'. Some of us SEE life, some of us FEEL life and some of us HEAR life.

Great teams are made up of all types of individuals and this is what keeps the world and your business growing and moving forward through support, diversity and synergy.



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Manufacturer: Individuals create a team with creativity and energy. If I have a pint over Zoom with friends, it just doesn't quite have the same feeling or enjoyment as being together in the real world, in the pub or sat in the garden. Individuals work better together or the phrase "out of sight, out of mind" wouldn't exist. Individuals also build and retain better rapport when together. For individuals that are new to a business/team, I would fear for how quickly they could build "true" rapport virtually - too many of us now think we have lots of friends because of followers or likes on social media, when there is zero history or rapport.

COMMUNICATION: body language, tone and context need to work together for effectiveness.

Service Business: We all know by now that only 7% of our communication are the words, the rest is tone and body language – this is the reason email/digital communication can be so misunderstood.

Think of our now regular Zoom meetings which frustrate with weak internet connections and distractions in the background. With some team being minimised or off screen, not being able to see everyone's reactions to comments and pick up on individual uncertainties becomes a frustration. People can hide their feelings much easier on zoom. As a manager of a team, this is hugely frustrating and one which I want to minimise going forward.

Face to face has massive benefits of immediacy, seeing body language and clear facial expressions.

Manufacturer: So many things can be lost in translation and a poorly written email is proof enough; no tone, no body language, no pace. We can often read an email and think the world is ending, only to find that person or customer is very happy, but their email said different.



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I also fear that, just as many people turn into keyboard warriors, and hide behind a social media persona - too many people now appear bi-polar as their social media status is painted to be the best life ever, whereas quite often real life is one of anxiety and anguish. People will disappear into the shadows of email, Zoom and Teams where you can hide a thousand issues.

SUMMARY - Choices are paramount

Service Business: We are all different – we all have different businesses; we all make personal life choices. Working from Home is not right for all of us. Perhaps we will choose to work from home more often, make fewer journeys for distant meetings but remember, great teams working together can be powerful forces for moving businesses forward.

Make our offices more spontaneous, drive inclusion for all the team, make every voice count, encourage work-life balance – all of this will provide motivated, happy people that generate ideas and help grow our businesses, at home or on site.

Manufacturer: Life is all about choices and if #WFH works for you and you choose to do it, then that's great; but for me - being in manufacturing I would never want to encourage a "Them and Us" culture. Making things, we predominantly need people on-site so we can see what is done and what needs to be done. If I thought it was right at any point for anyone to #WFH and it benefited the culture and the team, then I'm all for it; but I'd also like to build a company, an environment and a culture where people enjoy getting together and thrive off each other's energy and success.