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## Why I will never let our employees go fully remote after the pandemic

By JT McCormick for [CNN Business Perspectives](#)

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**Editor's Note:** JT McCormick serves as president and CEO of Scribe Media, a publishing company that helps you write, publish and market your book. The opinions expressed in this commentary are his own.



## JT MCCORMICK

In early May, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey sent an email to his staff telling them that some of them would be allowed to continue to work from home forever — even after the coronavirus pandemic's eventual end. The announcement came with the hashtag #LoveWhereverYouWork.

The following week, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that within the next five to 10 years, 50% of Facebook's workforce could be working remotely.

I couldn't disagree more with these decisions.

Don't get me wrong — at our company, Scribe Media, we closed our Austin-based offices and went to remote

work before the state of Texas issued stay-at-home orders. The safety and well-being of our team is our biggest priority, so it was an easy decision to make.

But I will never allow our company's employees to work from home permanently.

Remote work can and should be part of any company's model, but moving it to long term or indefinitely can be a big mistake. Society has been so focused on all the benefits that come with remote work that we haven't stopped to think about the inherent dangers it presents to our businesses.

## Spontaneous social interaction is essential

Remote work places a strain on the relationships among teammates by eliminating the spontaneous social interactions that are necessary for productive teamwork. Casual exchanges in the break room or hallways lay the foundation for trust by creating connection outside of the work itself.

According to Alex Pentland, director of MIT Connection Science, "Employee trust, solidarity, and mental health rely on the hundreds of minute affirmations and gestures of support that we offer those around us every day: expressions of understanding or empathy, nods of courtesy, morning greetings, and so on."

It's these subtle connections that breed "psychological safety," the belief that you won't be punished when you make a mistake at work. That psychological safety breeds a fully engaged workforce. A [two-year study](#) on team performance at Google found that individuals on teams with higher psychological safety are "more likely to harness the power of diverse ideas from their teammates, bring in more revenue, and [are] rated as effective twice as often by executives."

## Remote work stunts long-term innovation and growth

Remote work, by its nature, limits the free-flowing exchange of knowledge and information within an organization. No matter how advanced our digital tools may be, there's no getting around the fact that they don't lend themselves to the same half-baked, off-the-cuff "riffing" that happens when people are communicating in the office. What ends up happening is people keep their big ideas to themselves and there is less experimentation among teams, which ultimately leads to slower innovation as a whole.

In fact, a [study](#) by Harvard Business Review and Humanyze, an analytics software provider, showed that remote workers communicated nearly 80% less about their assignments than team members who worked in the same office did. In 17% of projects, they didn't communicate at all.

Remote work also prevents real-time problem solving. Instead of gathering all the necessary parties into a room to hash out the details, everyone has to sync their calendars and get on a Zoom call where discussions are awkward and disjointed.

## Great remote culture doesn't exist

No matter how advanced our technology gets, the basic facts remain the same. We're social beings who rely heavily on nonverbal communication. We're built for face-to-face interaction that even the best digital technology cannot replicate.

Remote working doesn't allow co-workers to establish meaningful relationships and mutual trust in the same way that working in the office does. Research from a [study of 1,153](#) global workers shows that remote employees are

more likely to report feeling mistreated and left out by their colleagues. Specifically, they worry that coworkers say bad things behind their backs, make changes to projects without telling them in advance and lobby against them.

It makes sense. When the human element of business is lost, people are reduced to mere inputs. Whether it's intentional or not, we start judging each other based on what a person can produce. Mutual purpose, connection and trust are replaced with judgement, comparison and fear.

# The future of work is dynamic

That said, I'm not arguing that remote work is all bad. In fact, remote work is an essential part of what I believe is the best solution for all companies — dynamic work.

In a dynamic work environment, companies maintain an office space but allow people a mix of in-office and remote work. The benefits to this type of arrangement are numerous.

Employees get the flexibility they want but get to maintain that critical stability and social connection they both want and need. Two to three days in the office per week allows for that spark of creativity and connection, while remote work can make them more productive. Eliminating their daily commute also means that people no longer need to live within a certain distance of the office, which makes it possible for people to relocate to more affordable locations outside of the city hubs where real estate prices have soared.

For the companies that provide it, a dynamic work environment can lead to reduced costs without the strain on relationships and productivity. Companies can rethink the size and location of their office spaces due to having less people on-site daily.

As we navigate this pandemic, it's great to see how we've adapted to a remote-first world, but offices aren't going away.

Many companies will be in the middle, where they will be both work-from-home, and with office space for people to meet and work together in person weekly. We need to embrace this huge but gradual change to not only how we work, but where and how we live our lives.

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