

Working from home?

by BRIAN LOCKHART

About a year ago I predicted there would be a baby boom early in 2021, thanks to the fact that so many people had to stay home because of the pandemic.

After all, a single blackout in the 60s in New York resulted in a baby boom nine months later ? although that apparently never really happened. How that story started is a mystery, because records show that nine months later the amount of real births was pretty much average.

So, I guess my prediction was wrong. A check on birth rates in Canada and worldwide reveal that it is remaining pretty steady all over the place.

Apparently boredom and isolation does nothing to encourage people to have children.

However, with so many people working from home these days, the whole work/personal dynamic certainly has changed. There has got to be ramifications from that change ? both good and bad.

We've all probably had jobs that we really liked and others that made you want to bee-line directly to the door when the clock hit quitting time.

I've had jobs where socialization and working with people was almost as important as the job itself.

I had one job where my co-workers were also my friends. We would meet up occasionally at each other's homes for social engagements, and once a month we would meet up after work and go out for dinner at a casino or a racetrack and just have a fun night out.

I've also had other jobs where half the employees were criminals and the boss would come out and threaten to fire us every day. I was less motivated at those work places.

Of course, not everyone can work from home or remotely.

If you're a plumber you can't fix someone's pipes on-line. If you work at a paving company, you still have to bring the asphalt to the job site and get the job done.

For many people, I would imagine mostly those that can use a computer to complete their work, working remotely is a real benefit.

I read an interesting story about a guy who travels North America in his van as a kind of working tourist. He was some kind of programmer and does all his work remotely. He hasn't been to the office in years.

There was a recent survey asking people about the benefits as well as negative aspects of working remotely.

At the top of the list for benefits, and not surprisingly, was the fact that the daily commute and associated costs are eliminated.

People also cited greater flexibility in working hours, and improved work/life balance, a greater ability to focus and concentrate on the work, and improved levels of productivity.

A large majority of those surveyed indicated that working from home has not impacted their production or level of work in a

negative fashion.

The survey also asked for the negative side of working remotely.

Social isolation and loneliness was at the top of the list. Sometimes having someone to go for a coffee with and discuss the details of last night's hockey game is a big deal.

Other negatives include diminished collaboration, communication and innovation, reduced opportunities for networking, and feelings of lack of fairness and equity.

There's a lot of truth in the 'out of sight, out of mind' aspect of working remotely. Your contribution may not be recognized quite as much as when you're actually there and engaging with people, discussing ideas, and presenting your work.

There can be a real loss of employee engagement and corporate culture.

While working at home does have a lot of benefits, it seems that when this whole pandemic situation is behind us, many companies will be re-examining their corporate culture and the way they do business.

There is now a lot of talk about a 'hybrid' type of arrangement where employees can work at home some days, but then must make the effort to show up at the office for a couple of days each week.

That seems to be a reasonable compromise that will give employees the convenience of getting their work done without spending time on the road every morning while giving the employer the opportunity to remain engaged with employees and create a cohesive working environment.

The workplace has changed - it's a sign of the times.