



Roundtable Member, **Jody Thompson**, Founding Principal of CultureRx®, explores the future of work and shares her tips for advocating for flexibility in a post-pandemic workplace.

Mentoring **MATTERS**



Throughout the pandemic, I have been fully working from home. This setup has worked really well for me and other members of our team for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, senior leadership and my boss are socializing the idea of returning to the office and would prefer to have everyone back in the office between Monday and Friday. This isn't sitting well with me and I'd like to talk to them about it. Any advice on how to approach the conversation without making it a career limiting move?

Things are not normal. Normal was when we mostly went into the office. Normal was when we could be assured that most people showed up at a place and time to do work. Normal was a lot of on-site meetings that created more on-site meetings. Normal was the energy we all felt when everyone was in the office during core working hours. Normal was the comfort for managers of "managing by walking around." If we can see people, they must be working, right?

A recent article from Harvard Business Review titled [*Remote Managers are Having Trust Issues*](#) stated that "research shows that managers who cannot "see" their direct reports sometimes struggle to trust that their employees are indeed working. When such doubts creep in, managers can start to develop an unreasonable expectation that those team members be available at all times, ultimately disrupting their work-home balance and causing more job stress."

And therein lies the problem. For the past 75 years the focus of managers and human resources has been solely on optimizing the practice of managing people at the expense of effectively managing the work.

Though not a COVID-19 specific issue, COVID-19 is shining a glaring spotlight on the problem.

You are managing well at home. You're getting stuff done. You're taking care of yourself and your loved ones. And you want to continue doing that post-pandemic. You want the choice about where you choose to work each day to be most effective and efficient – without damaging your career.

There is a way.

Here are three tips on how to make the conversation about work location with your manager irrelevant and unnecessary (who wants to have that uncomfortable conversation anyway?).

1. Change the Conversation

Work isn't a place you go, it's something you do. Starting right now, set the stage for conversations that are focused on the work, not where you're working from. Get crystal clear with your manager about what your measurable deliverables need to be, and most importantly, how you can — and will — keep your manager informed of your progress. Will it be a written update? A 1:1 check-in meeting as needed? Notes on a shared drive? You decide how you will keep you manager informed (you know, so they're watching the work, not watching you).

2. Be Accountable to Results

The future of work, during and post-COVID-19, is built on a foundation where each person is held accountable to measurable results, and each person is autonomous, making choices every day about the most effective and efficient way to deliver results for their employer. Now that you've had that conversation with your manager about the measurable results you need to achieve, then get the work done on time, every time. Do what you say you're going to do, and you will begin building a trusting relationship with your manager around the work, not work location.

3. Communicate Clearly

With your manager and work colleagues, communicate clearly about the work. Ask for what you need and when you need it. This will help everyone be more planful and efficient. Avoid ambiguous language like "can you get me that ASAP" or "sometime next week." This causes stress for everyone. Be clear. Tuesday at 10 am is clear and actionable. "When you have a chance" is not.

A New Work Culture

In a work culture built on a foundation of accountability and autonomy, people are where they need to be, when they need to be, to deliver results. That might be in the office, at a home office, on a video call, or emailing at 6 am — whatever it takes, but they are also free to help their kids with school during the day as needed, take the dog for a walk, power nap or run out for groceries — without feeling guilty.

Your career must be based on the great work you do and results you deliver; not based on subjective measures of "time in the office" or perceived effort. That's the old currency of work.

Autonomy to decide when, where, and how to work, and being held accountable to results — without it being career limiting — is the future. And a win for everyone.



Jody Thompson is the Founding Principal of CultureRx®. For the past 14 years, Jody has personally facilitated the change management communication and training process in select organizations to bring them to a state of sustainable high performance. Her clients consistently see increases in productivity, employee engagement, client satisfaction, and the ability to attract the best talent from all generations.

Jody Thompson is a world-recognized future workplace expert who has been featured on the covers of BusinessWeek, HR Magazine, and HR Executive Magazine, as well as in the New York Times, TIME Magazine, USA Today, and on Good Morning America, MSNBC and CNN.

She is the co-author of two best-selling books on the modern workplace and contemporary management principles, *Why Work Sucks and How to Fix It* and *Why Managing Sucks and How to Fix It*.



Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.