

BE PREPARED. BE RESILIENT: BEFORE SOUNDING A DEATH KNELL FOR THE MODERN OFFICE

According to the Brookings Institution, roughly half of U.S. employees worked from home during the COVID-19 shutdowns. This seismic shift, coupled with many companies – i.e. Facebook, Google, Morgan Stanley – announcing plans to allow telework at least some of the time even after a vaccine is widely available, have led to a healthy debate about the future of the office and the value of investing in physical space. Without question, there will be offices that shutter. There will be business owners that downsize their space or relocate to the suburbs. But in speaking with private business owners, it is clear there is an ever-increasing desire to return to the office. The uncertainty lies in WHEN and HOW. But what they know for sure is WHY. The top three reasons:

- Productivity
- Collaboration & Communication
- Culture

PRODUCTIVITY

Some 45% of employees say they are more productive working in an office, compared to 30% working at home. (Almost a quarter say they are equally productive in either setting.) It is also important to consider how WFH impacts your team holistically and in regard to collaboration, communication, and culture. Employers have spent countless hours trying to bolster a sense of comradery during months of WFH, using Zoom and other virtual tools to boost and maintain productivity, motivation and morale. Being in an environment that was curated solely for work, in the company of others who are doing the same, is incredibly motivating and simply cannot be replicated remotely.

COLLABORATION & COMMUNICATION

Some of the most ground-breaking innovations are conceived at unexpected times, in obscure places. Virtual communications will never truly replicate the spontaneous flow of a face-to-face interaction, whether they occur at your desk, the hallway, or at lunch. According to a study conducted by Harvard Business Review, “communication went up by 40% between employees with strong ties, but down 10% between colleagues with weak ties.”

The increasing gap in collaboration between different teams inherently creates a disconnect and lack of cohesiveness for the company as a whole. The isolation of WFH also decreases creativity due to the inability to immediately receive feedback and creates pockets of exclusivity within individual units.

CULTURE

At Bespoke, we have long held the belief that real estate is your down payment on culture. That has been tested by the pandemic – but it is truer today than ever before. Culture matters. It is the lifeblood of our business. It sustained us during the stay-at-home order, and it was the number one reason that our team wanted to reopen the office when it was safe to do so.

BE PREPARED & BE RESILIENT...GOING FORWARD.

The timing of the return is ultimately dictated by the local government in terms of capacity, and the guidance of the executive team. Determining how relies on logistics and motivation for employees to come back. Creating a safe space and communicating what the return will look and feel like are critical. Nonnegotiables include maintaining social distance, wearing masks where necessary, and providing the tools for proper hygiene. Download our guide, [here](#). Further, it is important to be clear that the opportunity to attract and retain top talent is now better than it has been in years, and at a cost that is most likely significantly lower than it would have been six months ago. Being seen and heard in person is crucial for talented employees looking for an accelerated, upward career trajectory.

In times of crisis, people tend to feel the need to take action or make a change. Our advice: **think long term**. Consider your strategic goals over the next 24-36 months and what it will take to get there. Reflexively reacting during times of uncertainty is an expensive game to play, especially when the repercussions are not fully developed. **At Bespoke we are leading the charge on the return to the office and would love to share our insights.**

TEAM BESPOKE