

How Technology Allows Us to be “On-Demand” for our Employers

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There is vast research about working from home being beneficial as it leads to more employee productivity from not having to commute, not spending as much time getting ready, and being easier for meals and breaks. Those arguments certainly proved true for many during the pandemic although admittedly some managers remain unconvinced that workers can be productive from home over the long-term. While many of my students used to doubt their ability to work from home due to distractions, I would guess that we’ve all grown in the ability to work from home due to COVID-19.

I’m sure that many have also found, however, that remote work leads to working even longer hours as it is much easier to start the workday early, work through lunch, and work later in the evening. If students want to meet very early in the morning or later in the evening, it is much easier for me to accommodate that via Zoom than it was in the past when we would be trying to find time in our calendars to meet in my office. Flexibility is certainly a huge perk from our technology world.

However, we have also known for years that many employees feel technology means they are always connected to their job – evenings, weekends, holidays, and vacations. Surveys demonstrate that commitment, morale, and satisfaction continue to decline and both stress and burnout are rising for the majority of employees. While we should all learn to set boundaries, schedule more personal activities, and not check work email as much after hours, those things are much easier said than done. Pandemic burnout has led to much speculation about vast levels of voluntary turnover now taking place (termed as the “Great Resignation”). Many companies have given us this flexibility to work from home and some have decided their employees can continue to work remotely going forward. Does that mean employees should be expected to go above and beyond their normal workweek and always be “on call” as a form of obligation to their employees for the flexibility they’ve been granted? If so, is this an ethical expectation or is this taking employee flexibility a bit too far and thus taking our most important resource for granted?

Former students, alumni, peers, and community members, I would love to hear your thoughts. Please feel free to reach out anytime on LinkedIn or via email (russell.guay@uni.edu).