



CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER
JONATHAN DAHL

Closing the Door

*Things were never easy for me
Peace of mind was hard to find*
—Phil Collins

It's embarrassing to admit it, but one of the happiest days in my career had nothing to do with getting a raise, or a promotion, or a project approved. It was the day I got my own office.

And a corner office at that! I'd spent years sitting in cubicles, trying to shut out the idle chatter of my colleagues and other workplace noise—and lo and behold, here was some 300 square feet of my own private paradise. On hectic days, I'd find refuge by merely shutting the door (and by the way, the walls were sheetrock, not glass). Then I'd finally be able to concentrate on the work at hand—like another editor-in-chief's letter I had put off.

The possibilities were endless—private conversations with colleagues or family members. Face-to-face meetings. I could take a nap on my couch, and no one would ever know. I could even hire a barber to come in to cut my hair behind closed doors (no, I didn't stoop to that, but the previous occupant did).



I'm reminiscing about a bygone era, of course, but it's because of a story we had in our *This Week in Leadership* newsletter about a hot new work trend called “monk mode.” That's when workers take strong if not extreme measures to cut out distractions, like avoiding all social media or ignoring emails and phone calls. Some do it for a few days at a time, others end up shutting out the world for weeks. On TikTok alone, videos with the hashtag #monkmode have been viewed over 70 million times.

All of which is kind of jarring—to think of the lengths people are taking just to find a way to gather their thoughts. But a lot of companies have moved to so-called open floor plans that not only eliminate offices but raise the sound level. To me, they resemble a train station. Then there is the hot desk movement, where instead of using permanent desks, everyone rotates around the room. Really, is it any wonder people complain they can't concentrate?

The answer isn't to return to 20th-century office set-ups—and not everyone can have an office anyway. But leaders need to better understand that workers, at least those returning to the office, still need ways to escape all the buzz—and just be able to think.

The former offices of *The Wall Street Journal*, where I used to work, were once famously decked out with “writing rooms,” tiny spaces where reporters could hole up for days or even weeks to finish an assignment. Other companies today are equipping their offices with everything from phone booths to private rooms to so-called pods to create some privacy for thinking time.

None of this is the perfect answer. There may never be one. Who knew that finding people peace of mind would be such a challenge? ▀