



CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER
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The New ‘Office’ Culture

It’s hard to imagine now, but there was a time, early in the pandemic, when corporate leaders and employees believed they’d eventually return to the office. Remote work—even if lockdowns temporarily required it—was a model that firms had repeatedly tried, and in most cases rejected. “The office” and “work” pretty much went hand in hand, as evidenced by all the gleaming glass towers that make up one city skyline after another.

Today, of course, that seems almost quaint. True, some industries, such as banking and law, have largely resumed in-office business. But earlier this year, even as the Omicron variant was fading, only about 40 percent of office seats were filled, according to a survey of ten major US cities. To give a little perspective, movie theaters were running at almost 60 percent capacity. And yes, while more people are now going back to offices full-time,



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few think that most corporate headquarters will be playing to full houses.

Which means that we have new office culture today—one without an office. It’s a big deal, given the century of in-office culture that we, our parents,

and our grandparents knew. In this new order, even little things from the past are no longer normal. For example, you start Zoom calls by asking not only how everyone is doing but also where they’re calling from. Because you don’t really know. Other protocols are also nothing like the chatting-at-the-watercooler days. You need a video-calling strategy that includes the right camera angle and background, so you don’t look like a fool (be sure to check out Arianne Cohen’s very detailed piece on videoconferencing in this edition of *Briefings*). You also risk looking foolish if you haven’t figured out how to unmute your calls; an amazing number of people haven’t. Presentation on that small screen is critical—after all, this is how your peers now see and judge you.

I’ve noticed an interesting twist: In this new culture, phone calls are less common. Instead, colleague after colleague now schedules one-on-one chats on Zoom. To many people, I suppose, the phone just seems outdated, or even

a sign that you’re not “all in” on the call. Give people a dark screen on Zoom, and they’ll no doubt suspect you’re eating lunch, paying no attention, or worse, sleeping.

Of course, this is not an office culture many corporate leaders consider ideal for productivity, innovation, or collaboration. They worry that people simply interact more effectively face-to-face. But a good number of us have learned to accept this new culture, especially as concern continues to grow over labor shortages and the Great Resignation. It’s the way of the world: a huge workplace shift that MBA students will be studying for years—doing most of their research not in person or by phone, but over Zoom. ▀

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Los Angeles, CA 90067

Advertising: Kristen Walsh +1 (802) 563-5097
Reprints: Tiffany Stezzenowski +1 (310) 226-6336
Circulation Customer Service: +1 (310) 596-6902



PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.
Produced utilizing solar power in a sustainable and environmentally responsible manner.

ISSN 1949-8385 © Copyright 2022, Korn Ferry

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