training

Super Bowl LVIII: The Officers vs. The Zoomers

How to create an elite hybrid work environment.

By **Anthony "AB" Bourke** - January 15, 2024

Super Bowl LVIII is nearly here. Let's talk about how winning teams arrive to game day best prepared. I'd like to make you a $1,000 bet on the winner of Super Bowl LVIII, which will be

played on February 11, 2024. The only catch is you don't get to know which teams are playing. The only thing you do know is that one of the teams (let's call them the Zoomers) has trained virtually for their entire season, using the best virtual trainers and technology available on the planet, while the other team (the Officers) has trained in person, the traditional way.

Both teams' regular season records are statistically equal. My money is on the team that has trained traditionally, the Officers. I'm asking you to bet on the Zoomers. Will you accept my terms? If your answer is, "No," can you explain why not, especially when remote workforce teams are reputedly *better* than their in-person counterparts?

Data Points

Since March 2020, I've read many articles and heard plenty of CEOs espouse the idea that remote workforces are more efficient, productive, and affordable than their in-person predecessors. And there is real data to corroborate this thesis:

- According to Forbes ADVISOR, as of 2023, 12.7 percent of full-time employees work from home and 28.2 percent work a hybrid model.

- The same article points out that 57 percent of workers would look for a new job if their current company didn't allow remote work.

- A study from Ergotron found that 40 percent of employees work longer hours at home than in the office. Data from the National Bureau of Economic Research shows that these extended workdays are 48.5 minutes longer on average. For full-time employees, this time could add up to more than 193 additional working hours in a year.

- A Stanford Study of 16,000 workers over nine months found that working from home increased productivity by 13 percent. This increase in performance was due to more calls per minute, which, in turn, were attributed to a quieter, more convenient working environment and a general increase in minutes per shift because of fewer breaks and sick days.

- According to ConnectSolutions, 77 percent of people work remotely; with 30 percent doing more work in less time, and 24 percent doing more work in the same period of time.

- Global Workplace Analytics reported that nearly 60 percent of employers identify cost savings as a significant telecommuting benefit. The company estimates that for all remote work-compatible jobs, if everyone who wanted to work remotely did so just half of the time, the total money saved would exceed $700 billion annually. This averages out to more than $11,000 per employee per year.

In-Person Is Uncomfortable

Staying home is a dream for many employees and a financial boon to their employers. Working from home eliminates "unnecessary" human interactions and office traditions. This is why people are so attracted to it. These "unnecessary" aspects of office life are essentially *uncomfortable*. Standing in the elevator with Stanley's BO is uncomfortable. Dave's annoyingly loud laugh heard across the entire office is uncomfortable. A suit is uncomfortable. Leather shoes. Heels. Anything compared with sweatpants. Packing lunch is uncomfortable. Sitting in traffic is uncomfortable. Let's face it—*showing up* is uncomfortable.

As much as no one wants to exist for long in a state of discomfort, sometimes what feels best to an individual comes at the cost of the overall success of a group. When we think about collective well-being in the workplace, we must ask ourselves, "Does the remote workforce model make for a better *team*?" Does working from home make people Super Bowl champions?

Do teams lose something vital when they give up training together, working together, eating together, and socializing together? In between those needling discomforts and banal moments

in an average day at the office exist real teambuilding experiences—inside jokes, office chit-chat, water-cooler philosophizing, spontaneous lunches, and many other casual and professional interactions—that can never be replicated authentically on Zoom. Those moments that may feel "unnecessary" to individuals are essential to teams.

When it comes right down to it, it's not all beach days for the post-COVID remote workforce, which is beginning to understand the Faustian trade of remote work. While it might make an employee's short-term life more comfortable, in the long term, it results in quantifiable detriments, including employee isolation, an inability to disconnect from the phone or laptop, and a deconstruction of the company's esprit de corps:

- Integrated Benefits Institute (IBI) an Oakland-based nonprofit research organization, found that 43 percent of remote workers are dealing with constant interruptions, and 23 percent are battling for home office space, as well as dealing with slow internet connections, isolation, houses in disarray, and seemingly endless workdays. Some 27 percent find it harder to balance work and family responsibilities; nearly half report spending too little time with their children under 18; and 40 percent say they spend too little time with their partner. Some 30 percent of remote workers also feel disconnected from their colleagues.

- The U.S. Chamber of Commerce noted that when asked if remote work has harmed their employees' mental health, 64 percent of executives said that it was, which was up from 55 percent from a year ago.

- The consensus, from sources including *New York Times* articles and Counsel on Foreign Relations essays, is that remote work often results in an imbalance between work and life, leading to "isolation" and "stress." Even *National Geographic* and *Psychology Today* have written full biopsy reports on today's second-most malicious illness, "Zoom fatigue."

Effects on New Hires

Consider the dramatic impact of remote work on new hires. In a world of virtual onboarding, instilling a world-class team culture in a 22-year-old recruit becomes challenging. Witnessing their peers' work or encountering their superiors in person, the initiates mimic and emulate their felt workplace ethos. Then, after months in the same room elevators, parking lots and

restaurants with coworkers, these new hires begin to develop trust in their coworkers. Just as important, their coworkers begin to trust them. This trust then fosters loyalty and accountability and keeps the team flying in formation.

Trust is the grease that lubricates effective teamwork. It enables us to innovate better, to be more empathetic, and to develop a deeper understanding of the whole—all of which is necessary for truly elite teams, the ones that compete every year for championship titles.

Champions Train Together

With decades of winning team experience, whether in high school, collegiate soccer, or as a U.S. Air Force F-16 pilot, I understand that a committed culture, built through shared meals, training, and collaborative film reviews is essential to becoming true champions because we dedicated ourselves to each other. It is said that through adversity we form our strongest bonds. In the realm of elite teams, the alchemy of face-to-face debriefings becomes the crucible for improvement and triumph.

These same principles apply to the business world. I certainly understand why some of today's CEOs embrace and espouse the benefits of a virtual workforce. In most cases, doing so saves them money, and their employees are happy at home. Any good leader must adapt to their current circumstances and lead their team during transitions, especially those as world-changing as COVID.

If you had asked top CEOs in January 2020 about their offices and innovative workplace culture, they all would have bragged about their open architecture, ability to convene, on-campus cafeterias, workout rooms, and yoga studios. This was because they wanted their teams practicing, training, and playing together—*in the same place*—all day, every day. It was because they knew how you build a championship team. They know how to win the Super Bowl.

In the contemporary workplace landscape, success now is defined by progressive corporate models rather than traditional structures. Leading companies such as Salesforce, Microsoft, and Google are focused on fostering elite cultures and championing inclusive, personalized workflows, and innovative benefits plans tailored to individual needs. The irony of past CEOs

boasting about in-person collaboration juxtaposed with the current virtual workforce trend underscores the shift toward adaptability, inclusive practices, and a commitment to personalized employee experiences.

So how do you win the Super Bowl? I want my team to work, train, eat, win, and lose together so we can build on what's working and fix what's not. This championship culture will never happen in a home office, in a spare bedroom, at the dining room table, or through virtual meetings. Champions train *together*.

Still want to take my bet? See you on February 11.

il Post Views: 61

Anthony "AB" Bourke

https://www.mach2consulting.com/

Anthony "AB" Bourke is CEO and founder of Mach 2 Consulting. Drawing on his experience as an F-16 fighter pilot and motivational speaker for leading corporations including Oracle, Pfizer, McDonald's, and ADT, Bourke challenges business leaders to rethink the balance between remote work and in-person collaboration.