

## REMOTE WORK AND INTROVERTS: STRONG APPROVAL WITH SOME CAVEATS

Remote work has moved from an experiment to the norm for millions of office workers around the world. Late last year, our company conducted a survey to discover how introverts, in particular, were responding to working from home full time. We had almost 200 responses. Were the assumptions about introverts finding their bliss true? What are introverts loving and what are they challenged by? Do they thrive in quiet and solitude or are they feeling disconnected and lonely?

### The Positives of Introverts Working at Home

The answers were *overwhelmingly* in favor of remote work. In fact, over 85% of the respondents indicated that they were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with the arrangement.

The three main positives listed were not having a commute, being more productive, and having less stress.

### No Commute

Not commuting was hands down the #1 reason for liking remote work by this group. Over 90% of respondents listed this as a benefit. “Not being subjected to road rage, and general negative moods has been a blessing.”

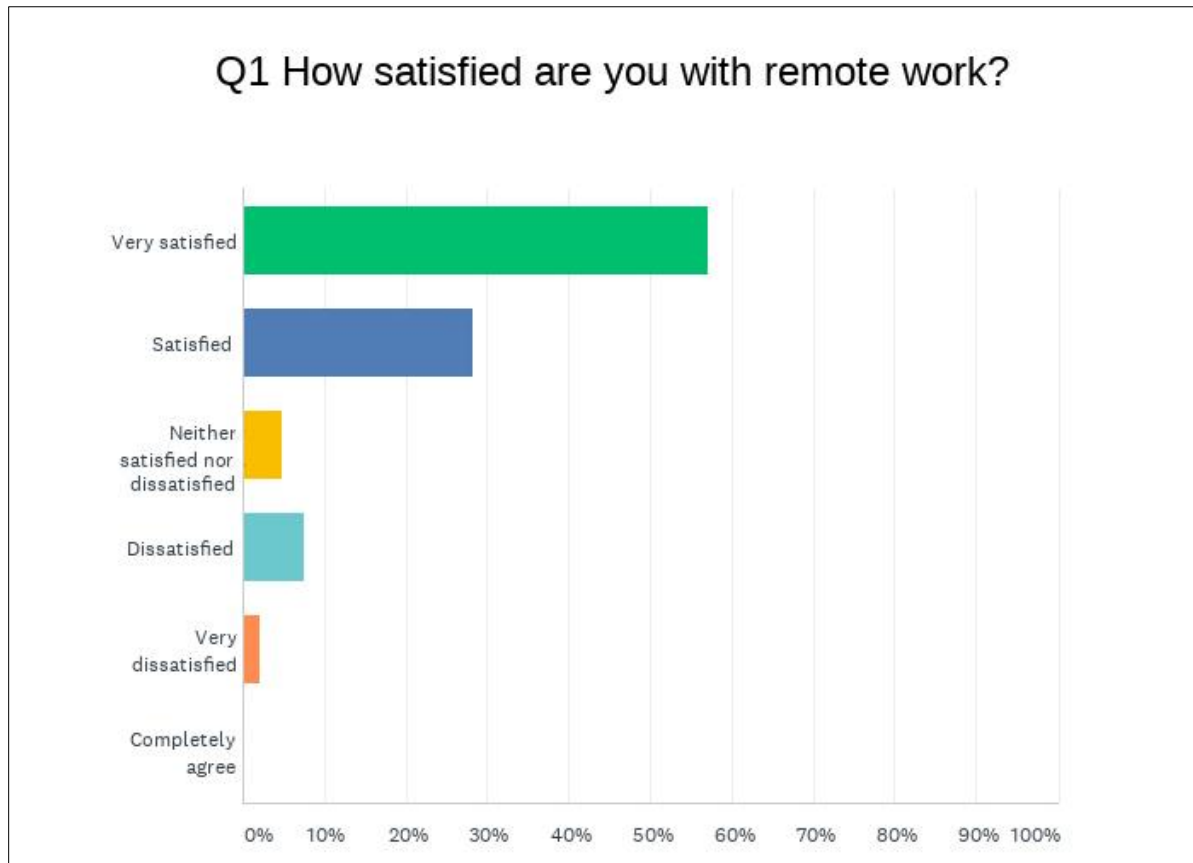
A number commented on being able to use that former commuting time to exercise, have more “time and energy for hobbies,” and one compared it to the past when she did a lot of “in office” commuting between conference rooms which “chews up a lot of time every day”.

### Productivity

Having a “Flexible Schedule” (64%), Lack of Interruptions (57%), Focus (45%), and Autonomy (47%) were also listed as benefits.

These numbers reflect what we know about introverts and their preference for working independently and going at their own pace — not at the quick tempo imposed by an extroverted work environment.

In a [2019 workplace survey](#) we had found that only 35% of respondents reported that their office offered ways for introverts to be productive. The result of this current study is evidence that many introverts feel that being at home allows them to get more work done. In addition, interruptions are typically a huge pain point for introverts who can be thrown off their focused, deep work. Being alone gives them this important quiet time to reflect.



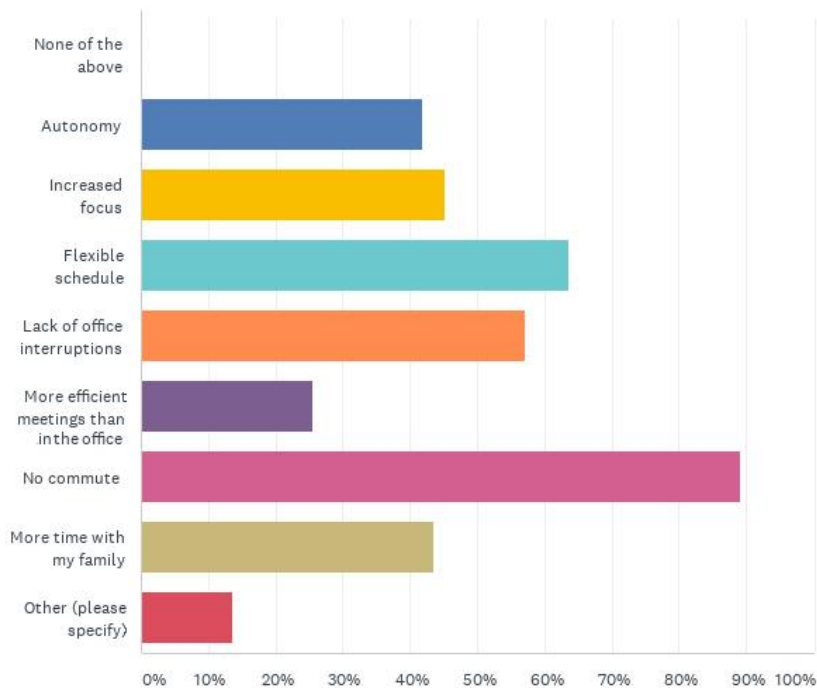
## Less Stress

Another positive trend identified in this current study was less stress. One respondent wrote that she had “less stress in every area of my life, and better personal and professional balance.” Another said they liked “Not having to put on my ‘workday face’ every day...preparing myself mentally for the random social interactions and general social noise which are particularly prevalent in an open office.”

Others expressed thoughts like, “being home with my dog,” “healthier days,” and “more exercise.” Another wrote, “I have so much more energy when working from home. It’s amazing how much I can get done, and how much less exhausted I am when the workday is done.” “I don’t have to worry about having a closed door during moments of recovery from overstimulation.”

Time with family was ranked as an important advantage by 43% of the respondents. This differs from a prevailing assumption in the media that families are great sources of distraction, not allowing work to get done.

## Q2 What have been the biggest positives about working from home for you?



## The Challenges

Despite the high satisfaction with remote work in this sample, three key challenges also arose: virtual meeting fatigue, stress, and disconnection from people.

Over 56% of respondents listed “virtual meeting fatigue” as a problem. One person wrote, “Extroverts want everyone to turn on their videos!” Setting boundaries to avoid more meetings in the virtual environment became important to manage fatigue. Another person wrote, “I’m much more drained at the end of the workday from communicating either by mobile phone or in virtual meetings.”

## Stress

Despite a reduction in stress being seen as a working from home benefit, at least 25% of introverts in this sample rated working from home as stressful. Here were some comments:

*People feel they can contact you any time of the day or night.*

*There are no breaks between meetings now. Before I had time built into my schedule to walk/bike/drive between buildings and that was a wonderful time to think. Now I'm lucky to get a quick walk to the bathroom and back to the computer.*

*As an introvert, I have actually found it difficult working from home all the time. I have always enjoyed working from home when I had major projects/policies, etc. to work on, but quite frankly working from home full-time has affected me mentally.*

A number commented that they were working longer hours and that the expectation was that they would be more available to their teams and bosses.

## Disconnection

Over 50% of the respondents expressed concerns about communication and connection. Almost 25% felt it has been challenging communicating with people outside their teams and 20% felt disconnected from their teams. There were *many* comments indicating that introverts miss the face-to-face connection and organic connection that comes from working in an office. Some concerns expressed were:

*While I tire of social pressure and engagements, I also value 1:1 conversation and I miss that.*

*I'm an introvert but enjoy the interaction I get in the office. For me, as much as I love having no commute, I would like a mix of in office and remote in the future.*

*As an introvert, I love working from home, but it increases my isolation on some days.*

*I miss the socializing, which is the glue of relationships, and opportunities to listen to employees for hidden topics.*

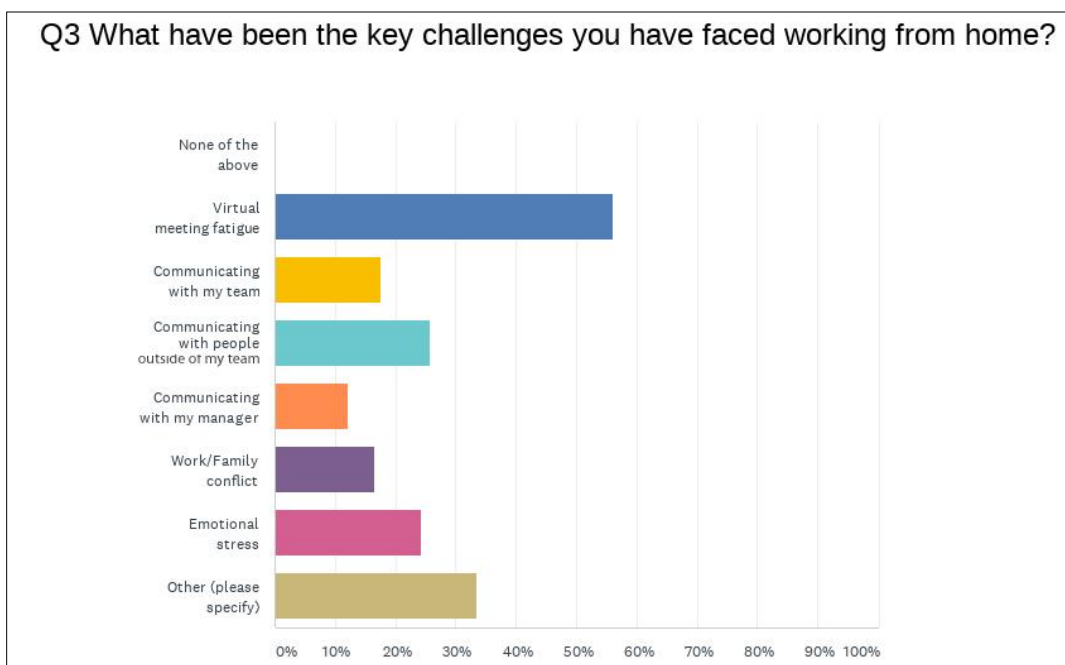
*As an introvert, you're easily forgotten and left off of meetings you should be on. I get very lonely sitting at home alone all day.*

*I miss informal interaction with people - the proverbial "water cooler conversations."*

*I miss spontaneous interactions. There are more scheduled interactions, and I am less able to ask a question in passing.*

*As an introvert, I understand the importance of staying connected to my team. Our relationships have deepened, and in many ways, we are working better but maintaining those strong bonds is emotionally draining. I was much more adept at managing the drop-ins and need for my attention when we were in the office.*

*Introverts need meaningful connection with others, which is often hard to have when you're on a time schedule in a virtual meeting. The unplanned times that create the opportunity for real connection are missing.*



## Moving Forward With Remote Work

Overall, introverts were very positive about working remotely. But the challenges were also strongly expressed. It is evident that working from home needs more consideration by organizations as they integrate remote work into their plans. Here are some next steps to consider.

1. **Ask introverts what they think** – In making decisions about evolving work arrangements post COVID-19, it is important to ask introverts what they think. Honor the introvert's preference for written communication and conduct ongoing surveys. Different major stressors (ex. the grief of losing family members to Covid-19, extended remote schooling, spouses' job losses, etc...) have emerged over the past year and will likely continue to evolve. You will learn a great deal about how you can make working from home work for introverts who are up against these challenges. You can also dig deeper with interviews and focus groups.
2. **Nurture productivity** – Many respondents said they were more productive and less stressed when working at home. Understand how you can help sustain that productivity by continuing to enhance home office support with upgraded equipment and technology tools. Create channels on programs like Slack for asynchronous communication. Also, decide as a team, what forms of communication will be most effective. You can create general guidelines around when to use email, texts, Slack channels, phone calls, and video calls. And evaluate these methods regularly to make sure they are working for everyone.
3. **Address stress** – Create a remote-working agreement with guidelines around accessibility and accountability. You can agree, for instance on having certain times that no meetings are scheduled. Keep on top of people's schedules by understanding the flow of their days and coach them on self-care methods like taking breaks and breathing. Encourage introverts to take vacation time to recharge their batteries.
4. **Manage virtual meetings** – As indicated in this survey, virtual meeting fatigue is real. Think through whether a meeting with several people is needed or if that same work can be done using written communication or one on one discussions. Consider how you can build connection over the phone for both tasks and relationship building.

When video calls are necessary, give people the chance to turn off their cameras because we are learning that leaving the camera on much of the day can be overstimulating and draining. Consider distributing pre-work, which allows introverts to prepare and contribute more. Use the chat and break out room functions to get higher introvert engagement. Check out many more ideas in [Creating Introvert-Friendly Workplaces](#) in the chapter on Building Teams.

5. **Intentionally build connection** – There were strong concerns in this survey around a lack of interaction and connection. We may not replace the “watercooler” conversations that happen spontaneously in the office. However, knowing how important it is to continue to build relationships between team members, and for the introverts' preference for deeper relationships, leaders can be more intentional in making these happen.

For example, we have seen new Employee Resource Groups for introverts emerge at Amazon and 84.51° where in addition to robust programming around introverted topics, members are encouraged to network. Book clubs like one at [Synchrony Financial](#) bring introverts together globally to learn from each other. Random matches of people for virtual coffees and internal mentoring programs are also getting positive reviews. Introverts can also be encouraged to take initiative and schedule purposeful time each week for check-ins with people in their network. Strong relationships *can* be built virtually. We have learned that over this past year.

## Summary

For organizations, there are many factors to weigh in deciding whether to return to the office, go fully remote, or create some type of hybrid scenario. Some introverts may want to return full time, others may prefer working from home. It is important to understand what individuals desire and not treat introverts monolithically. Whatever direction you or your organization decides to go, valuing the perspectives of introverts will be key in taking those next steps.

*Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD, CSP, is an author and one of the top global leadership speakers on introverts. She helps organizations unleash introvert talent through keynotes and conversations. Her latest book is, [Creating Introvert-Friendly Workplaces: How to Unleash Everyone's Talent and Performance](#) and her other bestselling books include [The Introverted Leader](#), [Quiet Influence](#), and [The Genius of Opposites](#). Her books have been translated into 18 languages and she has been featured in the Wall Street Journal, Forbes, and Fortune. Learn more at [jenniferkahnweiler.com](http://jenniferkahnweiler.com).*