

BEN 22 – Telecommuting: Back to the Office

Discussion Questions

1. Is telecommuting common in your country/industry?
2. What advantages/disadvantages do you think telework has?
3. Do you agree or disagree with Marissa Mayer's decision to stop Yahoo's work at home program? Why or why not?
4. How do you think technology will change the way we do work/study in the future?

Transcript

The question of “**live to work or work to live**” has been around for decades, with many employees trying to **strike** that perfect **work-life** balance. As Forbes notes, employees around the world benefit from the use of modern technology to do their work in the comfort of their own homes:

“Working at home, or from coffee shops or parks, seems by many in Silicon Valley to be a **birthright**. Facebook, after all, was invented in a college **dorm** room. The idea is that you don’t need to sit in a **cube** to be creative — in fact; innovation doesn’t come from within an office. It **thrives** every place but there.

Recently though, Yahoo’s CEO, Marissa Mayer, **made some waves** with her decision that all employees must work their **9 to 5s** in the office. In a memo to Yahoo employees, Mayer explained:

“To become the absolute best place to work, communication and **collaboration** will be important, so we need to be working **side-by-side**. That is why it is **critical** that we are all present in our offices. Some of the best decisions and **insights** come from **hallway** and **cafeteria** discussions, and **impromptu** team meetings. Speed and quality are often **sacrificed** when we work from home.”

As with all debates, there are **pros and cons** to each side, with supporters and **critics** claiming that **telework** is either good or bad for business. As the USA Today reported:

Proponents of **telecommuting** point to numerous studies showing that people who work from home are **on average** more productive than other workers and that telecommuting **cuts down on** traffic during peak hours, reduces companies’ **real estate** costs and improves employee **morale**, leading to less **turnover**.

One computer programmer told AllThingsD that working from home made him far more productive than being in the office. Why?

"I didn't have **to put up with numbskull** programmers constantly **yakking** to each other from the next set of cubicles about **non-work-related** stuff, and I wasn't getting distracted every 20 minutes by some bored **soul** coming over to my desk to go for coffee or **foosball**."

While working together is **logical** for many professions, others, such as software design and telephone sales, could be easily performed **remotely**. But, as CNBC points out, new ventures need to reflect carefully before they make the choice to allow telecommuting, or not:

Getting employees together, and **pushing** people out of their **comfort zones** is needed to drive innovation. We always **muse** about the three guys in a garage creating the next Apple or Facebook. Did you ever notice it's never three guys in three separate garages?

For others, the argument is that **virtual work** can lead to less **face-to-face** communication and social interactions, lack of trust among co-workers and managers, or a loss of **team spirit**. The NY Times reviewed studies showing that the **drawbacks** can be serious for both the employee and the company:

One Stanford study found that the rate at which **home-based workers** were promoted dropped by 50 percent, seeming to confirm the **cliché** "**out of sight, out of mind**." That is bad for workers who are **passed over**, but it is also bad for employers because they might be **wasting** the talents of potentially great managers.

Whatever side you take, **at the end of the day**, a job is something that we cannot **take for granted**. As TalkPoint CEO Nick Balletta concludes, those who have been **milking the system** need to understand that times are changing:

Telecommuting, once a **novelty** and a very practical solution in some situations, has now become an **entitlement**. An entitlement that in many cases has been **misused**, or dare I say, **abused**. People need to remember that it's called "work" for a reason."

Vocabulary

Telecommuting/Work at Home/Virtual Work: A process by which employees can perform job responsibilities at a site other than their primary business location, often in the home environment. Through the use of technology, employees can perform work remotely, instead of physically commuting.

Live to work or work to live: A popular saying that poses the questions: Is your career the most important aspect of your life. If you "live to work," it implies your career is more important; if you "work to live," then in general you view your job as just a means to make money.

To strike: To find, negotiate, or make an agreement; "By striking a deal with the marketing agency, Jaka was able to save our company thousands of dollars."

Work-life balance: The amount of time you spend doing your job compared with the amount of time you spend with your family and doing things you enjoy.

Birthright: A right, possession, or privilege that is given to someone at birth; "Universal healthcare is a birthright of all Canadian citizens."

Dorm/Dormitory: A communal residence usually found on a college/university campus; "Omen spent his university years living in the dormitory on campus."

Cube/Cubicle: A small area for work or study; "Dexter came by my cubicle a number of times today to ask me to help him with something; I got hardly any work done!"

To thrive: To succeed, do well, or prosper; "Social media advertising is a sector that has really thrived in the last 5 years, and will likely do so in the near future."

To make waves: To change an existing situation in a way which causes problems or upsets people; "Some workers felt it was not the time to make waves by organizing a union."

9 to 5: A standard 8-hour working day (including a break); "For many people, working 9 to 5 is a very difficult way to make a living."

Collaboration: Teamwork, alliance, or cooperation; "Moe and Tammy's collaboration in this project helped them defeat all of their competition."

Critical: Very important, crucial, or serious; "It's critical that these packages be shipped tonight, otherwise the clients will not receive their products, and we will lose a lot of money."

Insight: Understanding, awareness, or comprehension; "Could you please share your insights on what it was like living in China?"

Hallway: Corridor; "The new paintings on the walls along the hallway were done by a local artist."

Cafeteria: A communal meal area in a school, office, restaurant, or hospital; "Most cafeterias are known for serving food that doesn't taste good, but the one at my company is fantastic!"

Impromptu: Unplanned, spontaneous, or improvised; "The CEO asked Marcello to give an impromptu speech to the staff regarding the new financial policy changes at the bank."

To sacrifice: A loss or something you give up, usually for the sake of a better cause; "Parents *sacrifice* time and sleep to take care of their children."

Pros and cons: Positive and negative side/aspect.

Critic: A person who usually makes negative judgments or comments about a person, thing, or idea; "He may be a critic of his company's new mobile phone policy, but I don't think anyone will change their position."

Proponents: One who argues in support of something; "Natalia is a proponent of animal rights, and works with local non-profit groups to help them whenever she can."

On average: Generally speaking, typically; "On average, she teaches about 30hrs a week, but with the transportation strike, she's only able to teach six this week."

To cut down on: To reduce or limit; "With the high gas prices, companies have tried to cut down on the amount that staff travel around the province."

Real estate: Land plus anything permanently attached to it, and can be residential, commercial or industrial; "Abad started his career in real estate, but then moved in to the hospitality and tourism industry when the crisis began."

Morale: The degree or amount of mental confidence/happiness of a person or group; "Staff morale improved when Mason become head manager."

Turnover: The rate at which staff/employees in a company start and quit their job.

To put up with: To accept or have to deal with; "I'm getting very tired of putting up with unhappy customers all day long. I need to find a new job."

Numbskull: Stupid or unintelligent person; nitwit.

To yak: To speak a lot; "Every time I go to the copy machine, I see John in the break room yakking away on his phone to his girlfriend."

(Non) work-related: Having to do with, or be related to work.

Soul: Person or emotion; "Catherine is one of the kindest souls I have ever had the pleasure of meeting."

Foosball: A table game resembling soccer in which the ball is moved by moving rods to which small figures of players are attached – also table soccer.

Logical: A reasonable or obvious choice or decision; "While Shaune seemed like a logical choice for that position, the company decided to hire someone else."

Remotely: In a remote or distant way; "Drone airplanes are controlled in the United States to attack targets in the Middle East."

To push: Force to move in a certain direction; "Ken always pushed me to be a better manager and I owe a lot of my success to his leadership."

Comfort zone: A situation, place, or position in which a person feels secure, comfortable, or in control; "Spending a year traveling can really put a person outside of their comfort zone, but it will also be an experience they will never forget."

To muse: To think, consider, or contemplate; "I mused about the offer to move back to Asia, but logistically it just didn't make sense for me."

Face-to-face: In person; "After meeting each other regularly on Skype or telephone, it was great to finally meet my students face-to-face when I traveled to Germany."

Team spirit: The spirit of a group that makes the members want the group to succeed; "Successful companies like Facebook, Google, and Apple put a lot of emphasis on developing team spirit."

Drawback: Disadvantage, downside, or negative; "The only drawback to this plan is that we can't find enough well-qualified candidates for all of the positions."

Home-based worker: Someone who works based out of their home.

Cliché: An overused or predictable expression or idea; "It may sound cliché, but we can see the light at the end of the tunnel, and we're starting to come out of the recession."

Out of sight, out of mind: If you don't see someone or something enough or at all, they are easy to forget.

To be passed over (for): To not be considered for something; "George was passed over for this contract, even though he has a lot of skills and experience."

To waste: To use in a poor or careless way; "The amount of time and money we've wasted on this awful idea is incredible. Our company has lots millions of dollars!"

At the end of the day: In the end, as a result; "At the end of the day, it's just a small mistake, and you shouldn't feel too bad about it."

To take someone/thing for granted: To underestimate or undervalue; "Caterina took for granted how difficult her university studies would be, and now she needs to work harder than ever."

To milk the system: To take the most possible out of the system using it to your absolute advantage; "After years of milking the system, the government finally realized that he was lying about his disability and forced him to repay the money that they had given him."

Novelty: The quality of being new, interesting, and unusual; "After using only her small 10" netbook for two years, working on a full-sized computer was a novelty."

Entitlement: An object, idea, or situation that someone is entitled to have or receive; "Entitlement programs in Canada such as Student Loans, Social Security, and Health Care are what make it such a great place to live."

To misuse: Improper or incorrect use of something; "Government officials were suspected of misusing public money (taxes) for their own benefit."

To abuse: Repeated and deliberate/intentional improper or incorrect use of something; "The verbal and mental abuse at their company became so bad that the staff called the labor relations board to come in and investigate."

Language Review

A. Collocations

Match the words in each column to make a collocation from today's lesson. (Look for collocations specific to this lesson, as more than one answer is possible for some words.)

| | | |
|----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1. Strike | a. Meeting | Strike a deal |
| 2. Milk | b. Zone | Milk the system |
| 3. Impromptu | c. Morale | Impromptu meeting |
| 4. Staff | d. A deal | Staff morale |
| 5. Comfort | e. Market | Comfort zone |
| 6. Real Estate | f. The system | Real estate market |

B. Review Quiz

1. According to the article, why did Marissa Mayer choose to stop the telework practices at Yahoo?
 - a. It was costing too much money.
 - b. Employees were unhappy.
 - c. To improve productivity and performance.
 - d. To reduce pollution costs.
2. Which of the following is **NOT** a reason to work at home?
 - a. Employees can spend more time with their family.
 - b. More face-to-face time with coworkers.
 - c. Less time spent in traffic.
 - d. More comfortable work environment.
3. "Mr. Kirk's decision to expand our company during this economic crisis is very _____."
 - a. Unlogical
 - b. Alogical
 - c. Logical
 - d. Illogical
4. The expression, "That's not even remotely possible" is closest in meaning to:
 - a. It's absolutely not possible.
 - b. It's maybe possible.
 - c. It's probably not a good idea.
 - d. It's no problem.

5. "His stories about working with professional athletes were great at the beginning, but after a while the _____ wore off."
- Musing
 - Novelty
 - Thriving
 - Comfort
6. "Rumors around the _____ are that the CFO will be fired at the end of the month."
- Critics
 - Balance
 - Foosball table
 - Hallway
7. "Vodafone and their work unions have not yet _____ an agreement with each other; they may be forced to cut some staff."
- Strike
 - Striked
 - Struck
 - Strikes
8. "We _____ that he would stay with us for another two years, but his new job offer was very good."
- Put up with
 - Took it for granted
 - Turned it over
 - Made
- some waves
9. "You're _____ to your opinion, but I strongly disagree!"
- Entitled
 - Birthright
 - Cutting down
 - Passing
- over
10. "I appreciate the _____ effort your time put in on this task. It's excellent work."
- Collaborating
 - Collaborated
 - Collaborative
 - Collaborately

Answers

A. Collocations

| | | |
|----------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Strike | a. Meeting | Strike a deal |
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B. Review Quiz

1/c 2/b 3/d 4/a 5/b 6/d 7/c 8/b 9/a 10/c

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

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