



AVOIDING THE HERD

PRAGMATIC DESIGN

Q3: BALANCING PRIORITIES





Avoiding the Herd

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Dave Gilmore examines leadership choices around “working from anywhere.”

As we continue to reshape ourselves post-COVID, we welcome the arrival of a new world order in hopes that the worst of the pandemic is behind us. We will look ahead and eagerly anticipate new waves of prosperity and achievement to mark these times. Optimism is building, and we are mostly enthusiastic about the years to come. So, what have we learned and what will we remember and carry with us from the fearful and precarious near past into this promising future? Honestly, it's a real question, begging for – or perhaps demanding – a real response from each of you.

What's the “so what” of the past few years? Winston Churchill wrote, “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” What lessons have our collective recent history taught us about ourselves as individuals, as neighbors, as communities? What have we learned about the design communities as we passed through this pandemic period? The way of work has altered, as have the patterns of coming and going to work. The traditional office is clearly in question.



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The paradigm of millions upon millions of knowledge workers joining a daily commute only to house themselves for eight to 10 hours in a cubicle or four-walled office box seems kind of silly, really. The collective annual cost of commuting alone could quite possibly end poverty in the world or fund do-good/do-well climate action investments. Think about the daily pre-pandemic spend on automobile gasoline or the total cost of vehicle ownership expended just to have a vehicle in which to travel back and forth to a work cubicle: down payments, monthly purchase or lease payments, collision insurance, license tags, tires, maintenance and more, mostly to travel from a home garage to an office garage and back. Really now, what are we learning and what will we change?

The way of human interaction has been altered as well. Our daily screen time as a substitute for sitting physically together with others has increased 50–70% since the onset of the pandemic. Though natural and a fine substitute as a means to connect and communicate, we're discovering that remote work is not quite the same as physical proximity. Don't get me wrong, I celebrate the tremendous rewards we are experiencing daily through advanced uses of digital expression. It is truly extraordinary what we're achieving. But we mustn't settle for an either/or simplicity, as a sustainable living balance is necessary to thrive.

As we move through the coming months and are faced with the choice of going forward or backward, we must choose forward. "Working from anywhere" is here to stay. The challenge to establish and maintain balance is both a person-by-person choice as well as an employer choice. It's important for leaders to spend the time and effort to explore the multiple variables of healthy balance for those they lead in their specific group and individual contexts. Don't go with the flow or popular trends. Weigh the priorities in play for you and your team.

Most are mindlessly following the herd of social media influencers rather than seeking to understand the close realities and work-life dynamics that directly impact their employees and the output of their work. Avoid the herd and lead your organization through the core values you've established.

Be the leader we all need you to be: Don't outsource your responsibility for organizational well-being.

What kind of leader are you?



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