SMPS Seattle Fellows Forum

December 2021 | Continued Virtuality and the Hybrid Work Model: What Does it Mean for Marketing Departments?

1. Working remotely is the fastest social change in modern times, and it seems to be working. But does it work *better*? Why or why not?

BILL: Yes, it works well - but I'm not convinced it's better. There are too many missed opportunities and blurred boundaries.

CARLA: No commute, fewer interruptions, and working in sweats—what's not to love? Truthfully, to encourage creativity and innovation that comes from diversity of thinking and interaction, a hybrid model works better.

KENDA: Is it working? I don't think it is. I have a stack of articles on my desk that says it isn't working. Social isolation is causing increasing mental health issues, and we're losing the sense of 'team' we built when working together.

TED: For the most part, live human exchange is superior for the BUSINESS. The areas of improvement from virtual work are mostly for the EMPLOYEE: work/life balance, flexibility, less time commuting, etc., but humans are pack animals and companies want and need the pack together to thrive and succeed long-term. And, critically, clients are getting wiser and want people "on the ground."

VICKY: It can work better by allowing greater productivity with better control over interruptions.

DARA: Neither. It works differently. To address what we will be faced with, a useful first step may be to jettison the corporate dichotomies we've inherited: good/bad, succeed/fail, perform/languish, etc. and use a sliding scale to assess effectiveness for people and work arrangements. The shift we have experienced together should act as a catalyst for a different paradigm framed around how people thrive

2. Any successful remote (or partially remote) marketing/BD team doesn't happen accidentally. What advice would you give, especially when trying to create a consistent culture with employees who WFH and those working in the office.

BILL: Make sure firm culture, vision, and goals are a part of every meeting, activity, project, and decision.

CARLA: It requires a shared vision and values, and intentional and transparent communication. Once a year bring the entire team together for two days for a "marketing palooza" of training, planning, and team building.

KENDA: We were already a remote marketing/BD team and maintain our culture with frequent communication. We meet on a weekly basis to discuss objectives and action items and meet in person at least once a year. We also try to attend regional and national SMPS events and spend time as a team for at least one event (like a dinner). We also plan virtual happy hours regularly.

TED: Facilitate meetings with directed and specific participation to keep all involved engaged. Shorter, but more frequent meetings. Mandatory meetings. No participants with videos turned off. And advice to everyone, especially those working at home: Who are YOUR clients? How do they work best? How will you serve THEM? Figure that out and your work and career will thrive no matter where you sit.

VICKY: Be accountable. Expect accountability to be the same, whether WFH or the office.

DARA: Don't assume that how we worked before was the best model. This could be an opportunity for people to do their best work since they have more autonomy over their working conditions. For managers, maintain consistent dialogue among teams and conduct regular one-on-one discussions. Check in across the organization to make sure that we are meeting (or exceeding) expectations and address any problems immediately so that relationships aren't damaged, and trust is maintained.

3. How are AEC employers and marketing/BD team leaders evolving their marketing and BD *staff structure/organization* in response to the hybrid work model?

BILL: Not sure they need to – a strong marketing/BD organization built on firm vision, goals, and accountability – can rise above the present situation.

CARLA: The pandemic created an opportunity to redefine the way we work. To focus on *outcomes* rather than *hours* or location. To reward high impact work. We all need to be advocates for a flexible workplace culture.

KENDA: We haven't made any changes to our staff in response to the hybrid work model.

TED: I really don't know. This is what I want to learn!

VICKY: We understand the need to be flexible, we need to recognize the techniques that work, thus integrating them into marketing/BD.

DARA: Rethink your meetings. Virtual meetings have laid bare what has been a persistent element of in-office culture: bad meetings. Since marketing teams are responsible for creating so many meetings, this is a real opportunity to take a different approach in your meeting structure, rhythm, and duration. I highly recommend the book *The Surprising Science of Meetings: How you can lead your team to peak performance* by Steven Rogelberg.

4. How do hybrid and work-from-anywhere business models impact recruiting and retention?

BILL: Recruiting and retention are difficult…period! Remote both helps and hinders (i.e., training 'new-to-the-industry' marketing staff).

CARLA: Employers and managers need to elevate the employee experience, think globally, and adapt to a hybrid work model if they hope to recruit and retain the best.

KENDA: The flexibility we've gained to intersperse our personal and work lives is hard to give up. I think a hybrid or complete work-from-home option will be needed to stay competitive in recruiting.

TED: It seems to me that all the sudden—presto, change—employers realized they in fact ***can*** be much more flexible to attract and retain the talent they want. The world, and the oyster, are much larger.

VICKY: By giving the employee the freedom and flexibility to get their job done.

DARA: Hybrid work deepens your talent pool which helps with recruiting, but it also creates risks related to retention. Employees have choices and aren't restricted by geography, so the burden is on managers to make it a job that people want to stick with.

5. Name the best productivity hack you or your firm introduced in the past year and how it's helping you stay connected and focused on the big picture.

BILL: Miro Collaboration – great tool for department, project, activity, pursuit, or presentations.

CARLA: Prezi for Zoom presentations – you can toggle between the speaker and the PPT slide. With Calendly you can schedule meetings without all the back and forth of trying to find a time that works for both/all parties.

TED: Taking notes directly on the keyboard during meetings; use of Miro/Mural/similar can be really engaging, and terrific to use and come back to, add, edit, etc. I love virtual 'war rooms' for project capture or company strategy.

VICKY: Zoom happy hour! A good way to stay in touch and connected on many levels in a comfortable setting during these interesting times.

DARA: Technology has improved more over the last year than it has over the last 30. Empower your staff to look for ways to improve your workflow by providing time for them to be a champion for an application/process. We've had a lot of success with Mural, Miro, Mentimeter, Teams, OneNote, and Monday when someone agrees to be the evangelist and integration champion for the team/org.