

Hi, this is Wayne Rivers at FBI and *We Build Better Contractors*.

This week, I want to talk about the future of remote work in construction. What's the future? Is it everybody back in the office? Is it everybody remote? Is it some hybrid? I'm the first to say, I do not know. But I wanted to crowdsource it. So, I was at a peer group meeting with 15 or so men and women contractors. And I said, "Okay, what do y'all think about it?" Well, what you're about to hear is really, really interesting.

Now what about this is important to you? We're all struggling with this. We don't know what's right in the post-COVID world. Should we mandate stuff, or should we leave it? It's just so nebulous right now. So, I've got quite a few points here. Nine specific points that I heard from these construction leaders, and I'm going to go ahead and reveal they do not believe in hybrid and remote work. And here are the reasons that they gave me. Okay.

First thing is it's inequitable. Now this came directly from the diversity, equity, and inclusion committee of one of the members. And they used the word inequitable and that's a loaded word in today's environment because it doesn't treat all employees equally. Well, you can't deny that that's an issue. Part and parcel with that was the next point and that was it's inconsistent. Having office workers, for example, able to have either flex schedules or do remote work completely is quite different. When you've got technicians in the field, you've got superintendents in the field, you've got foreman out there. They have to be on the job site. You cannot manage a construction project from your couch. It just doesn't work that way. So, inconsistency and inequity are the first two things they said.

The third thing they said was it hurts young people who are trying to learn. It's much easier, better, organic for people learning the construction business to do that in an environment where other construction people are in the same environment with them. That makes perfect sense. Think about somebody being at home, remote, they can be taking online classes, they can do be doing a bunch of things, but I learned better from interacting with other people. And I think so many others do too.

The fourth thing was that... believe it or not, they said remote work is unfair to leadership because it allows employees to meter. That was the word they used, meter access to themselves. Now I have to say, I've seen this. I've seen people that I know taking extra-long lunch, or maybe even taking a nap during the middle of what would normally be considered work hours. And then you take a little refresher nap, you pop up, you get on your computer, and you pick up again. So, I think metering is... that's a real thing.

The next thing was an absence of hallway meetings. This is one of my huge pet peeves about hybrid and remote work. I know at our shop, when everybody's present, the four times a year, we have an all hands and we get all our brains together. Man, that is so enlivening and enriching to have all that brain power. And if you need to call a quick... to do blogs, sometimes I get my guys together and I say, "Hey, help me with this blog, help me flush this out." And when people are in the office and we can have a 10-minute quick get together and just kick around ideas, it's so energizing. And you don't get that when your office is half or two-thirds empty.

This was a big thing they said. The post-COVID rules are going to prove to be temporary. The new normal will revert back to the old normal, over time. Again, I don't know. But this is what these folks said. And golly, these are some super powerful ENR 400 folks. I mean, these guys are really successful. I have to put a lot of weight in their opinions. That's a really interesting take. And I don't think I'd ever heard that before.

The next thing was the remote hybrid stuff inhibits alignment. There again, the lack of hallway meetings, the lack of training for young people and all that stuff. It inhibits being able to align all your people to your mission, vision, and values and all the other things.

The next thing they said, this was the eighth reason. They've had people threaten so to speak and they say, "You know what? If we go back in the office environment, we'll just leave and go somewhere else." And that has not happened. According to these contractors that has not happened. People are leaving, but they're not leaving because of the lack of a hybrid work schedule.

And then the final thing was remote workers. Remote workers can't volunteer for stuff. I mean, they can, I suppose, but they're unlikely to volunteer for stuff. So, taking on more responsibility, getting involved in community type things, getting involved in team stuff in the office, all that kind of stuff. They lose the ability to volunteer. And in our case at FBI, if people aren't around, to me, it makes it harder for leadership to voluntold them.

Is that a word? Voluntold? It's been said that I do that. If you don't have people around you, you can't say, "Hey, John. Golly, it just occurred to me that you would be great for this." And that's harder to do. So those are the nine reasons they gave for why remote is not going to work and hybrid even is not going to work very well in the construction business. One of the members said this and I wrote it down exactly as a quote, "We win and solve problems." I'm sorry, contractors. "Contractors win by solving problems. And we can best do that together." And when he said together, he means physically together. Are they right? I don't know. Great thoughts, a great opportunity for you to comment. What do you think? What do you see as the future? Is it hybrid? Is it remote? Is it everybody in the office? Is it some weird amalgamation we haven't thought of yet? Let's hear from you in the comments. This is Wayne Rivers at FBI and *We Build Better Contractors*.