



Why return to normal? How to capitalize on lessons learned

Susan Fowler

Changes inspired by holding on for dear life in a world turned upside may be worth keeping, according to recent [reports](#). But how do leaders evaluate what practices to keep and what's just working in the moment?

What new practices are worth keeping, and why?

Taking advantage of this crisis or any major change requires taking stock of what's working. But to adapt, transition and potentially transform the way we work requires understanding why a new or different practice works. I encourage you to investigate what's working and then investigate why.

People [report](#) that some of the changes in response to the current crisis are positive. Which of these statements would you agree are true for the people you lead?

1. Working from home is hard, but it has its positive side.
2. Transparency has increased, and this is a good thing.
3. Leadership seems more empathetic and caring about employees' physical health and mental well-being.
4. I've come to appreciate my coworkers more than ever; I miss working beside people.
5. I can't believe how much we're/I'm learning, especially about technology.
6. My personal productivity is improved.

Surveying your team members to see what they think is working better is important. But to determine which practices are worth keeping, you need to investigate why a new or changed practice results in greater productivity and flourishing.

To aid your investigation, look to the compelling science of thriving. Never has understanding the true nature of human motivation been more relevant. Notice that the changes people report to be working are aligned with the three foundational needs required for people to thrive: choice, connection and competence. You will also notice that these are the changes in improving performance, productivity, and outcomes.

Practices worth keeping promote choice

Working from home is challenging with homeschooling kids, food prep, space issues, technology requirements -- the list goes on. But while costly and disruptive in the beginning, studies are showing that the flexibility of working from home leads to more choices and feelings of agency, control over your life and the decisions you make, and empowerment. Choice is one of the three psychological needs required for thriving. The more you thrive, the more productive you are. Which leads to feeling better about the choices you're making. A virtuous cycle, not a vicious one!

According to a [study](#) by Willis Towers Watson, 79% of companies have seen a positive or neutral change in employee productivity with more employees working from home. This doesn't mean that we should all work from home always and forever. But having flexibility about when and how to work from home is a practice worth keeping because it promotes choice.

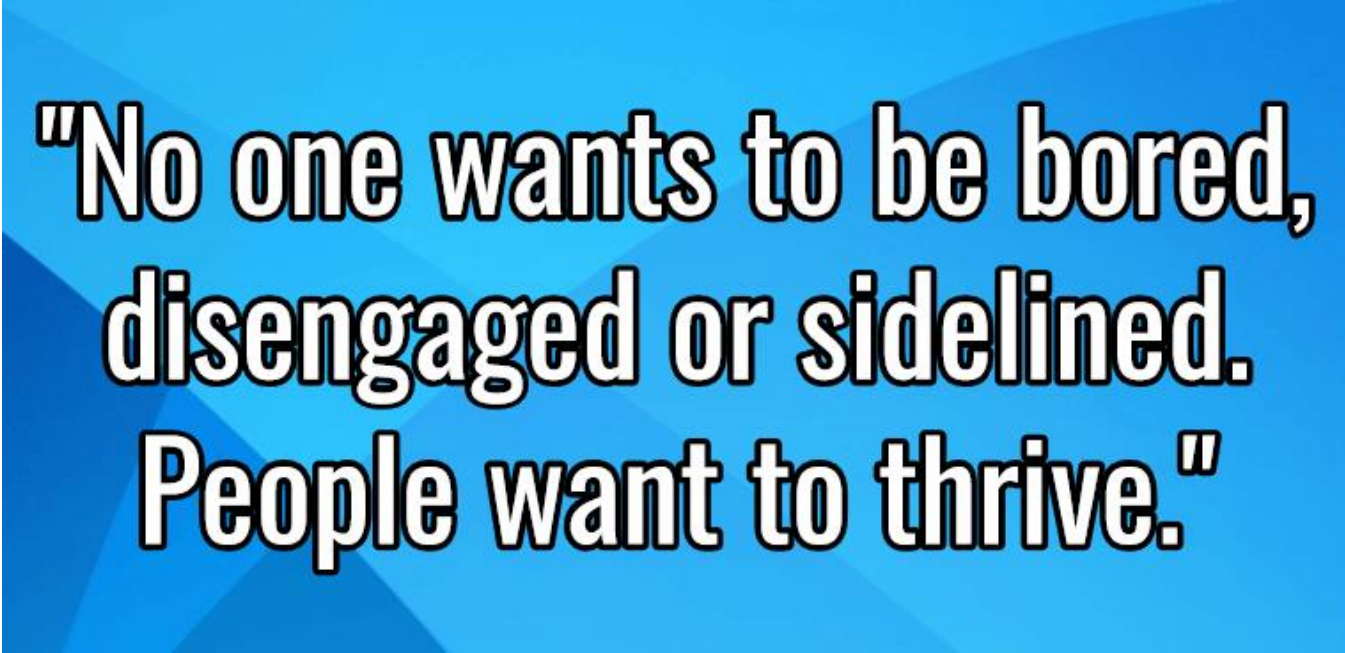
Practices worth keeping promote connection

A major change people are experiencing is increased transparency. Leaders are sharing more rationale behind decisions being made, revealing previously private financial data and expressing their own fears and concerns.

Revealing vulnerability, implementing health and wellness plans, and demonstrating empathy are all essential leadership practices for deepening connection -- the second psychological need required for thriving.

It's not random that CEO is morphing to chief empathy officer. I can almost guarantee that we'll see opinions about company culture improve, along with reports of a better employee experience. People are cherishing being a valued part of a community at work.

Transparency, vulnerability and a focus on safety, health and wellness -- these are practices worth keeping because they deepen connection.



**"No one wants to be bored,
disengaged or sidelined.
People want to thrive."**

Practices worth keeping promote competence

Reportedly, [investment](#) in HR and talent programs is burgeoning. I'm personally receiving an unprecedented increase in requests to deliver virtual keynotes and training sessions on mastering motivation and self-leadership skills.

But what thrills me is companies abandoning programs focused on bonus plans and performance rewards. Motivation science proves that these programs rarely work because they generate undue competition, fear of failing, apprehension at missing out, pressure and stress that undermine the positive energy, creativity and innovation needed to pursue and achieve the goals being rewarded.

Shifting from external and imposed motivation to practices that value learning and collaboration are worth keeping because they build competence.

Beyond transitioning to transformation

Genuine transformation occurs with practices that support people's needs for choice, connection and competence. For example, [research](#) shows that trust is a by-product of leaders and workplaces promoting choice, deepening connection and building competence.

So, it's not surprising that 85% of the respondents in the Willis Towers Watson survey expressed trust in senior executives based on how they are handling major changes. An entire organizational culture can be recreated by implementing practices that satisfy the three foundational psychological needs required for people to thrive.

Essential truths have been reinforced in this time of uncertainty: People crave choices, long to contribute to meaningful work and appreciate opportunities to learn and

grow. No one wants to be bored, disengaged or sidelined. People want to thrive. It's our nature to be resilient.

Leaders need to ask themselves: What am I doing in a crisis to support people's intrinsic desire to thrive? What am I doing now to promote Choice, deepen Connection, and build Competence that I need to continue doing?

Why return to normal?

We have the single greatest opportunity, perhaps in history, to transform the way we work. The beauty of recreating our workplaces by creating choice, connection and competence is that when people thrive, they also produce. When you shift your focus from what you want from people to what you want for people, good things happen for everyone.

As a leader, you can take lessons learned, backed by science, and transform a workplace where people thrive -- with sustained positive energy, results and trust as the by-product. Why return to normal when you can transition to something better than normal?

Susan Fowler is on a mission to help you learn the skill of motivation. In her latest book, "[Master Your Motivation: Three Scientific Truths for Achieving Your Goals](#)," she presents an evolutionary idea: motivation is a skill. Providing real-world examples and empirical evidence, Fowler teaches you how to achieve your goals and flourish as you succeed. She is also the author of bylined articles, peer-reviewed research, and eight books, including the best-selling "[Self Leadership and The One Minute Manager](#)" with Ken Blanchard and "[Why Motivating People Doesn't Work ... And What Does: The New Science of Leading, Engaging, and Energizing](#)." Tens of thousands of people worldwide have learned from her ideas through training programs. For more information, visit [SusanFowler.com](#).

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