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Not Everyone Needs to Work in an Office to be Productive

by Dr. Woody The Career Hot Seat Published March 04, 2013 FOXBusiness



Relationships are critical in any business environment, and there is no doubt that our most meaningful interactions are with those around us. However, we live in a globally-connected world where we can still interact without being physically next to each other.

Or at least that's what I thought.

Yahoo! CEO Marissa Mayer made headlines last week recalling the tech giant's work-from-home policy. An e-mail from the head of the company's human resources department, leaked to tech blog [All Things D](#), explains that in order to drive better collaboration "we need to be working side-by-side."

The memo rippled throughout the corporate world and there has been a lot of debate about the notion of working remotely and the larger ramifications of Mayer's decision. As an organizational psychologist I spend a lot of my time working with executives, so here are a few thoughts on Mayer's decision.

An Issue of Control

In laying out the new policy, it appears that Mayer has mistaken "all hands on deck" for "all hands in the office." Thanks to technology advances, "on deck" is more often about being online than being physically present. There is no doubt that proximity is the greatest driver of relationships, but there is a cost to cutting out those who don't have the luxury of living close to the office.

Every worker has a different personal circumstances, which is why flexibility from the C-suite is critical to creating a healthy work environment.

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According to Modesto Maidique, executive director of the [Florida International University Center for Leadership](#), "it can be difficult to build esprit de corps with a remote culture" but he says this decision is like "you shoot yourself in the foot by narrowing the pool of talent you have access to." At a time where companies are expanding their reach for talent, Yahoo! is retracting into its shell.

"This can be dangerous because you are leaving an open flank for your competitors to take advantage of," says Maidique.

Courage or Callous?

Many have hailed Mayer's policy as bold and courageous, and there are even reports that company employees admit to taking advantage of the work-from-home policy.

Maidique notes that "courage doesn't mean indiscriminately ignoring good management practice." Instead of actually facing the problem of poor performance within her company, Mayer used a broad brush policy to paint over the lack of proper management and protocol.

A courageous approach would have been pinpointing those remote workers who were underperforming or not "innovating" enough and firing them directly.

Courage is also about taking a leap of faith and believing in your people. In a recent blog, [Richard Branson, Founder of Virgin Group](#), reacted to Mayer's decision by pointing out that "to successfully work with other people, you have to trust each other" and that her decision sends the wrong message.

When you tell your employees: I need you where I can see you, the message sounds more like: I need you here because I don't trust you being out on your own. Without trust you don't have a foundation for building a quality relationship regardless of your physical proximity.

Not All Great Talent Resides in Your Neighborhood

Maidique notes that the advantage of being open to remote workers "is that you can bring on a lot of people you otherwise would not have access to." Some of the greatest talent can be found burrowed up in little known nooks all across the world. To tell these folks they need to hoof it into the big city to rub elbows with co-workers flies in the face of what innovation is about.

When you become geographically bound, particularly to Silicon Valley, you close creative windows into the outside world. Having individuals physically located and operating out of remote locations can offer highly-personal insights into those growing markets that



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can't be simulated in a conference room. Innovation often comes from actually stepping out of the office and taking a walk in your consumer's shoes.

Successful executives, just like great coaches, work with their people, not against them. We all have different styles, dispositions, talents and comfort zones. There are a lot of disciplined people who can function well in a remote environment. Not all ideas come from hanging out around the company ping pong table. I know this because it's my life. I wrote my entire book sitting at my local Starbucks ([SBUX](#)).

There is no doubt that Mayer has good intentions and wants to get Yahoo! back on track. However, this was a poorly written memo of tragic proportions. We live in a world where nothing is sacred and perception is everything. Yahoo! has been trounced by its competition and this new work policy will only accentuate just how out of touch the company has become with the globally-connected world they helped to create.

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