

# What COVID-19 Is Teaching Us About Working From Home for Health Reasons



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Last Week

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For the past two months or so, since the COVID-19 pandemic began, I've watched America, my country, change — a lot. Day by day, life as we knew it drifted into a memory close enough to miss, but far enough to not be rekindled. I began to watch a rather repetitive medley of store closings, deaths, politician speeches, super-scripted “we're here with you” emails — rinse and repeat.

It's been sad. It's been terrifying. Thinking about all the people whose lives have been sacrificed for the sake of skimping on the severity of this virus makes me want to cry.

But there's something else. There's some part of this whole thing that rocks my soul to the core — WFH. Yep, those three little letters are the “luxury” that many weren't afforded prior to the grip of this pandemic. Before there was [COVID](#), there was a slew of companies claiming the work just couldn't be done without the corporate dress, on corporate butts, in corporate seats.

The pandemic detector determined: that was a lie.

Don't get me wrong, I am ecstatic to see how many Americans have been able to shift their workspaces to their living and dining rooms for the sake of maintaining their health. In a [recent Gallup survey](#), Americans have noted the increase of remote work opportunities from 39 percent to a whopping 57

percent since the [COVID-19](#) quarantines really took off (polls were taken between March 30 – April 2).

What pains me is the number of offices that deemed productivity impossible without having employees physically visible. For many companies, the work is completely doable and can continue on without a hitch, while employees have the freedom of pajamas and the company of their pets snuggled at their feet.

Some bosses argue that productivity will decrease if employees are allowed to work from their homes. Yet, a Stanford study proved a [13 percent increase in productivity](#) due to workers' ability to concentrate and likelihood to work the full workday.

So why is it that so many companies see the option of remote work as a luxurious gift? And what does that mean for people who needed to stay at home for their health long before the solidarity of a horrifying global pandemic? Many times, it meant that we couldn't have a job at all.

I'm speaking from experience.

The plethora of “everyone is working from home” headlines triggered a memory that reminded me of the very reason I put my heart and soul into [Girls Chronically Rock](#).

Before Girls Chronically Rock, I was part of a large well-known company doing work I adored — merchandising fashion. For somewhere between two and three years, I poured my heart into learning and putting the fruit of my craft into large department stores and small boutiques. I would have pretty atypical days, traveling from one store to another, drawing out the essence of the brands I represented through their respective setups throughout the clothing sections. I loved the work and something about the work certainly loved me, too. My

efforts were proven. My outputs were solid. And yet, when my legs got too weak to stand on, my job became just as shaky.

I remember my first time falling. I'd been enjoying the day with my mother and sister when *boom*. I found myself on the ground, wondering what on earth had happened. I don't know how I fell. My legs just seemed to have given out. I considered that maybe I just needed to lose weight and brushed it off as I got help back onto my feet and continued along with my day.

In the back of my mind, I worried. I began to notice a weakness slowly creeping up on me. I felt an accompanying worry weighing me down, too. I was afraid to tell my job what was going on. I didn't even really know if I should — I was doing so well there, and it was supplementing my life as a graduate student; it wasn't in my plans for it to be messed up. But after a series of other falls and weird degenerative symptoms, my mom and I agreed it was time to throw myself into testing and figure out what on earth was going on.

I found out. It was muscular dystrophy, but I wasn't ready to let that diagnosis be true. "Maybe it's a mistake," I thought.

It wasn't.

After I could no longer put it off, I wrote a detailed letter to my director and some folks in human resources. I was terrified but I knew it had to be done. I stated my accomplishments, reminded them of my proven ability to work without close supervision and creative efforts. And then I dropped the bomb: I have [muscular dystrophy](#).

I sunk as I wrote it. Then I followed by stating that I would likely need accommodations in the near future. I could do everything I was doing, but I needed the flexibility to work from home. By this time, my arms and legs had already gotten weaker. And falls were more frequent.

While my director was sympathetic, HR was not. I pleaded with human resources. I promised that my production wouldn't dwindle. They assured me no accommodations could be made for my situation. My disability.

My disability was not accommodated. It was not tolerated. Sadly, I am no longer at the company. I was heartbroken and confused.

I am experiencing those feelings all over again.

The [coronavirus](#) pandemic has shed light on many injustices and unnecessary nuances of America's healthcare, welfare and corporate systems. It took high concentrations of the virus and a large number of deaths to have companies adopt a sense of humanity, caring enough about their employees' well-being as they contributed to the success of their organizations.

It's infuriating to watch as suddenly the things I was told were impossible were made possible within weeks. The only conclusion I can draw is that those of us with disabilities are less valued. Our accommodations are apparently elective, our contributions to the workforce deemed expendable. Yet the very things we've begged for are doable for the masses of able-bodied equals.

Look how easy this was!

While the severity of this time has proven that many corporations can save their malarkey about WFH not being possible, it's also proven that some folks are more susceptible to certain health issues. Though perhaps more at-risk for immune deficiencies or physical disability, those people — people like me — are just as smart, capable, and valuable to the companies we want to serve and grow with.

We have been fighting for this for a while. I don't wish a disability or disease on anyone, but I am angered by the reality that the "impossible" was made possible in the blink of an eye. Why has it always been such a hassle? I don't know the answer to "why," but I can tell you now more than ever that it shouldn't have been.

My hope is that when things take flight in the "new normal" world, working from home will be seen as a viable option and not a luxurious (and discriminatory) accommodation.

The disabled and disease community has seen what is possible. Don't question our intelligence or diminish our value any longer. Working from home was always possible. Let us do so, and be great!

*“The Playlist to Help You Face Difficult Times”*  
from  
The Mighty.com

1. “Alive” by Sia
2. “Fight Song” by Rachel Platten
3. “Whatever” by Godsmack
4. “Unwritten” by Natasha Bedingfield
5. “You Don’t Own Me” by Bette Midler
6. “Try” by Pink
7. “Here Comes the Sun” by The Beatles
8. “Try Everything” by Shakira
9. “No More Bad Days” by This Wild Life
10. “Road Less Traveled” by Lauren Alaina
11. “The Story” by Sarah Ramirez
12. “Animal I Have Become” by Three Days Grace
13. “The Cave” by Mumford & Sons
14. “Don’t You Worry Child” by Swedish House Mafia
15. “She Used to Be Mine” by Sara Bareilles
16. “Get Better” by Frank Turner
17. “Uprising” by Muse
18. “Stronger” by Kelly Clarkson
19. “Don’t Look Back in Anger” by Oasis