

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

This week I want to talk about the trend of re-officing. So, we have this question out there, what's the right way? Is it in the office, is it remote work, and I can tell you that question has been answered once and for all, and how do I know that? Well, because Zoom, the company that nobody had ever heard of prior to the pandemic, the company that made its fortune based on the pandemic in fact, has now declared that their employees must come back into the office two days a week. When Zoom, the very epitome of remote work communication, says you got to come back to work, well, that really, really says something.

There's this delicate dance. We're trying to find the happy medium, what works best? Remote? In the office? Some hybrid form? The hybrid toothpaste is out of the tube now, we're not going to put it back, so it seems like that's the trend that most people are going to.

But construction has always had that. Construction has always had an element of in-office versus out of the office, because you can't build stuff in the field inside your office. You can talk about it, you can conceive it, you can plan for it, you can do all those things, but you can't execute a building project or an overpass or a bridge or something inside your office. You just can't do it. So, construction may have the opportunity to really be an industry that leads other industries into how to get it right, because let's face it, most of our successful contractors have figured this thing out quite a long time ago.

All right, so where is in-person, in the office, clearly better, okay? Onboarding new hires, orienting and integrating your new hires, collaborating. In-person collaboration, I think, beats virtual by just... it's just not even close. It's not even a close race. Resolving complicated issues is done better in person than virtual. Culture building and affirming... When I talk to CEOs, I think that the biggest worry that everybody has with this hybrid environment that we have now, is culture. How do we continue to build and strengthen our culture and doing that live and in-person is the best way. Holding people accountable, especially when it's time to have those difficult conversations about lack of performance or lack of chemistry or fit or whatever it happens to be, and then training up new employees, giving them exposure to their supervisors, so the supervisors can see and teach and mentor and direct, and the newer employees can observe what management does and how they do it and learn from them. That's all best done in person.

Okay. How do you go about re-officing as Zoom is doing? How do you go about making it work, okay? Just a few tips, seven tips in fact. Number one, you got to emphasize the benefits, so going through that quick list that I just did, you got to have people understand the benefits of being live and in-person versus virtual. Persuade, sell, I know that's a bad word for some of you, persuade, sell, encourage your folks. Talk about it all the time as much as you need to.

Two, lead by example. If you say, "Hey, get back in the office, everyone," and you're remote 90% of the time, that doesn't send exactly the right message.

Number three, run better, tighter, more focused meetings. People hate meetings, so much of the time because they're unfocused, they meander, they take too long. They keep people away from doing other tasks outside of the meeting room, so run your meetings better. You can learn to do that. It's a learned skill.

Number four, improve your facility. Make your facility more attractive, more interactive. I know that the open office concept is a big thing, and some people just don't like it, but it does, if you have open areas at least in your office, that does improve the opportunity for collaboration.

Number five, give freebies, lunch. The power of food to bring people together is amazing, so for just a few bucks you can buy lunch for people in the office, pizza for people in the field, whatever it happens to be, and do team building that way.

Number six, emphasize the importance of soft interactions. What are soft interactions? Back in the day you would say... watercooler talk is what people would say, but the idea that I can walk up and down the halls in our office and just drop

in and say, "Oh, by the way, John, X, Y, Z this, and what do you think," and just... these impromptu off-the-cuff, "Oh, I just had a thought. Let me run that by Neha." Being in the office allows you to do that. Those soft interactions, the unplanned, unscheduled interactions are so valuable.

And then the seventh tip, invest in training. Your people want to see that you're invested in their future, and one of the most obvious ways to do that is to make sure that you're getting them adequate training for whatever their role might be in the organization.

So, Zoom has put the kibosh on a hundred percent remote work for lots and lots of people. What do you think? What works for you? In office, hybrid, remote, what do you think? What's your philosophy? What can we learn from you? Share with us in the comments.

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