



ConvergenceCoaching, LLC

10 Real Reasons to Go (and Stay) Remote

For 20 years, my consulting firm has been completely virtual and flexible, with unlimited paid time off. We kept our technology assets in the cloud before it was called the cloud. We started the business this way, because it allowed us to build a specialized team regardless of where they lived and to keep our fixed costs down, too. We are huge proponents of anytime, anywhere work in the CPA profession, publishing a biennial [flex-practices benchmark study](#) and encouraging firm leaders to open their minds and shift their business models to include flexible and remote work programs and remote service delivery for clients.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, there was traction on flex and better pickup on remote work than we've ever seen before. But there is still a strong bias against remote work and remote service delivery among some, mostly traditional firm leaders. Until this bias is acknowledged and addressed, I fear it will hold firms back in realizing their full potential. In this article, we'll explore 10 reasons firms should move to remote work management on an ongoing basis and why resisting remote work and service delivery can place your firm at a competitive disadvantage.

So, why remote and why now?

- **Your people want remote work.** This trend started years ago. The 2016 [INSIDE Public Accounting Road to Retention survey](#) found that work/life balance and flexibility were critical factors keeping Gen X and Millennial talent at work in accounting firms. And 77% of respondents to a 2017 [aftercollege.com](#) survey said that the ability to work from home one day a week would influence them to take a job offer. [Gallup](#) has found that 37% of employees "would switch to a job that allows them to work off-site at least part of the time." *If you want to attract and keep talent, you need to support remote work.*
- **Your clients don't need you on-site for all of service delivery.** Our CPA and consulting firm clients have found that their clients increasingly accept remote client service, and that more and more clients are proactively asking for it. Many clients are happy to have their conference rooms back and to no longer need to meet your people each morning or manage your presence on-site. They are fine with more service delivery being done away from their location and via video, provided they still have some opportunities to see and meet with key people from your firm.
- **Commuting stinks.** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average commute time across the U.S. was [26.6 minutes in 2018](#). We know it's much longer than that in most major markets. Your people may wonder why they make long commutes into your office when they could be more productive at home, especially on days with heavy traffic and/or inclement weather. Firms that regularly send their people to client locations for work often wonder why their turnover is highest at the senior and manager level. One reason may be that those people have grown weary of the stress caused by commuting away from their homes week after week.
- **The technology is there.** Your people can be frustrated by having to go to a client's office and use the less-than-stellar wireless there to access data the client has loaded on your firm's portal. Instead, why not let them use the high-speed Wi-Fi at your office or their home office, where they may have three or four monitors to access and evaluate that same data? From paperless technology to high-speed internet, videoconferencing, collaboration tools, and more, the technology is there to support production and teamwork off-site.
- **You'll gain flexibility in job scheduling.** When you give up your attachment to traditional on-site work, you'll be able to schedule your higher-level people on multiple jobs at once, because they don't have to be on-site at a specific client's location. This allows you to run jobs in parallel versus serially and have jobs run into the following week to be completed, enhancing overall scheduling and productivity.



ConvergenceCoaching, LLC

10 Real Reasons to Go (and Stay) Remote

- **It opens new labor markets.** If you're having trouble finding people in your current market, the ability to manage a remote workforce can remove your geographic boundaries for recruiting. Now you can "rescue" talent who no longer want to work for traditional firms in their local area and offer them opportunities to be part of your progressive firm on a remote basis instead. If commute times limit your local recruiting, you can remove that inhibitor by allowing those who live just beyond commuting reach to work remotely. And, when you support remote work, you'll be able to recruit talented alumni who left your firm because they couldn't handle the commute time any longer.
- **Labor costs may be lower, and labor quality may be higher elsewhere.** If you're located in a high-dollar labor market such as New York City, Atlanta, San Francisco, or Washington, D.C., hiring talent in other areas will reduce your overall labor costs. And, when the labor market you're in is highly competitive, looking outside your area can elevate the caliber of talent you can attract.
- **You can access new client markets without having to invest in brick-and-mortar expansion.** When you perfect remote service delivery and remote team management, you can credibly develop a regional or national practice, especially when you specialize in a specific type of client industry or service. As general compliance work becomes increasingly automated and commoditized, developing a specialty and expanding it geographically, without the expense of new office space, can provide a smart organic growth opportunity for your firm.
- **Remote service can keep you from being price-constrained by your local marketplace.** If your firm is in a smaller town, you may find the average clients in your area unable or unwilling to pay the rates you deserve for your level of expertise. Adopting a remote service delivery model can enable firms to sell to clients who fit their ideal target profile and are willing and able to pay their rates, regardless of geography.
- **If you're multi-office, you're already doing this anyway!** A big "aha" moment for many multi-office firms comes when they realize that managing a remote team working from their homes is the same as managing a remote team of people working from their firm's other offices. If you're managing cross-office teams, moving to managing an expanded remote workforce is a no-brainer.

If you're not yet convinced, consider these findings from the [2019 State of Remote Work](#) survey: Remote workers are 29% more likely to say they're happy in their jobs than on-site workers, and are 13% more likely to stay with their current employer for the next five years.

Expand your mental boundaries and business model constructs, and you can attract and retain an engaged workforce, access the best talent and clients across geographic borders, and maximize your organic growth opportunities. Go remote!

[Jennifer Wilson](#) is a partner and co-founder of ConvergenceCoaching LLC, a leadership and management consulting and coaching firm that helps leaders achieve success. Learn more about the company and its services at convergencecoaching.com.

As published on March 23, 2020 in AICPA's CPA Insider under copyright date 2020 at: www.journalofaccountancy.com