



MARCH 2021

EMPLOYEE VOICES: ONE YEAR OF WORK AMIDST COVID-19

Findings from WerkLabs' 1:1 interviews with moms as they reflect on having endured one full, unpredictable year of work amidst COVID-19, childcare shortages, and virtual schooling.

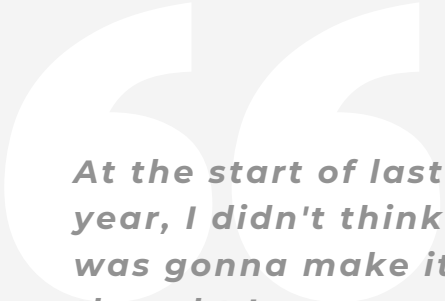


March 13, 2021 marked one year since COVID-19 was declared a national emergency in the United States.

For many, this one year mark signifies that they have made it through one of the most difficult years of their lives- losing loved ones, employment, and time- for themselves and family. For some, in spite of these inevitable hardships, this date may also mark one year of growth- growing in relationships, careers, faith and a new understanding of personal priorities and goals.

The aim of the present WerkLabs research report is to provide a glimpse into what one year of work amidst the COVID-19 pandemic looked like for working moms. In particular this report highlights relatively universal themes expressed by moms when asked to describe their experiences regarding one year of work amidst COVID-19.

This report can stand alone or be viewed as a complementary guide to WerkLabs' March 2021 Report, **One Year of Work & COVID-19**.



At the start of last year, I didn't think I was gonna make it. I thought I was gonna lose my mind. I mean, I really did, but I have made it, and this situation has definitely has evolved."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs

Our Process

We interviewed moms using an open-ended, semi-structured approach, meaning that while the interviews covered intended topic areas, the conversations were intentionally broad so that the moms could discuss what matters most to them. Interviews were conducted until clear themes began to repeat across interviewees (a point of saturation).

Our Findings

Overall, the sentiments we hear being expressed with the greatest magnitude and frequency among moms when asked about the last year of work are:

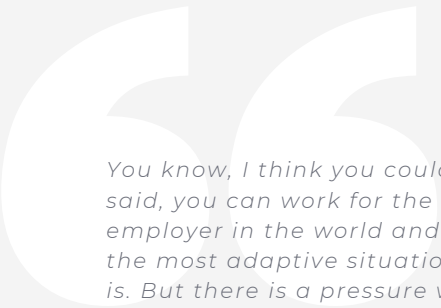
- 1.It's Just Been Harder for Moms
- 2.A Strong Desire for Remote
- 3.Days Don't Seem to End
- 4.The Power of Mom Networks
- 5.A Fear and Hope for the Future

IT'S JUST BEEN HARDER FOR MOMS

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Even with the most supportive work situation, this past year has just been more difficult on moms.

This past year was different for moms. Even with the most supportive employer, spouse/partner, family, and co-workers, this last year affected moms differently. Moms express this sentiment not as a dig to non-parents or fathers, but more so as a fact. There is a unique bond between child and mother and in a year where kids' routines had been completely uprooted, it has tended to be moms who assumed a heavier load of the logistical and emotional burden. This sentiment is amplified for those moms who are single parents, especially. Moms have also experienced high levels of guilt this past year- guilt for having to resort to more screen time for their children as well as guilt within their teams at work for feeling as though they are burdening other non-parent co-workers with some of their workload.



You know, I think you could, like I said, you can work for the best employer in the world and have the most adaptive situation there is. But there is a pressure we women have. There is a different pressure we have as moms."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs

And I think as moms we are putting so much attention on giving them [children] affection, like physical touch and affection because you don't get it anywhere else anymore. Yeah. And that's an emotional drain on the moms too, cuz it's a lot of pressure on the moms because it feels like you have to give so much emotionally."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs.

I wish I had a crystal ball to shake to know how every decision I was making is affecting them. I'll have a meeting and they'll come in and need help with something and I'll be like just give me a minute, and it's hard for kids to understand. As much as it is for me as an adult to understand that my home is my office, it's harder for them to understand their home is their school. So it's a constant personal struggle and just an emotional roller coaster."

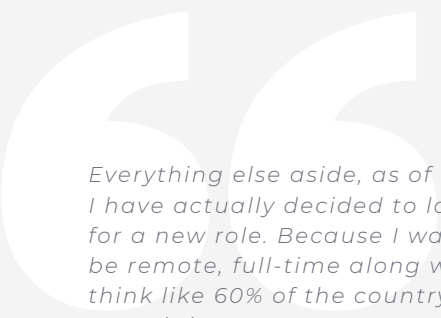
-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs

A STRONG DESIRE FOR REMOTE

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Work from home mandates have given moms the opportunity to experience remote work, and there is unanimous preference for it.

For moms who have worked remotely to some extent this past year, there is consensus behind wanting the continued option to work remotely in the future. Moms cite an increase to both work and home productivity by eliminating commute times and having the ability to better “chunk” priorities throughout their day. Additionally, moms note that remote allows for greater inclusivity in regard to diversity. Offering remote allows organizations to be able to recruit from new geographical regions and also better support neurodiversity, such as those who may have ADHD and feel more productive at home. However, most also express interest in a hybrid work schedule, with three days at home and two days in the office being the most desirable option expressed by moms. The determination to work remotely in the future is so critical, that moms whose organizations have expressed not allowing for continued remote are already starting to look for new employment opportunities.



Everything else aside, as of late, I have actually decided to look for a new role. Because I want to be remote, full-time along with I think like 60% of the country now....it is a great agency, I love my boss, I love the VP...but I want to be remote."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs

The pandemic has re-shaped my company's work culture, propelling us into a more modern environment, accepting remote work as legitimate. I enjoy that side of it because I was thinking about leaving the organization prior to Covid due to my very long commute, paired with picking up the kids. It was too much for one person."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs.

I think I would love to go in like two days a week. That's kind of my ideal because I really do miss my colleagues, and I do think that something has been lost without that in-person interaction and running into people."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs.

My workplace did not offer any remote work options before the pandemic. As a new mom, I am so thankful I was able to be home with my baby and was able to shift to a more flexible and remote workplace and schedule. While I feel productive at home, in my ideal setting I would love to go back to the office 1-2 days per week but continue remote/flexible work."

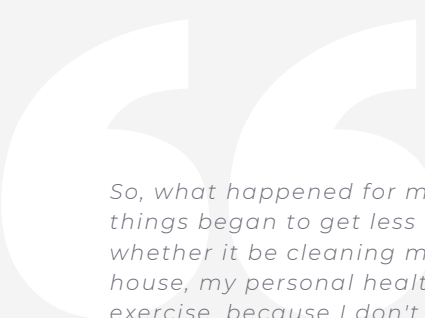
-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs

THE DAYS DON'T SEEM TO END

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Increased workloads, virtual schoolings, and a lack of boundaries has extended work weeks to far beyond 40 hours for moms.

This past year, balancing new childcare demands and virtual schooling throughout the day made it next to impossible for moms to complete work during the typical 9-5. For many, work days start long before kids wake up and extend late into the night. Despite the desire to work remote, many note that it has made establishing boundaries much more difficult. This was exacerbated by the fact that due to the pandemic most non-work, extracurricular activities were eliminated, leading some co-workers to assume that the pandemic resulted in a greater ability to work more hours. For moms, this pressure to be online and the flow of never-ending video meetings has come at the sacrifice of their own personal physical and mental health, with there being little to no time for self-care.



So, what happened for me is things began to get less time whether it be cleaning my house, my personal health, exercise, because I don't get to work a full workday from eight to five. I am having to manage my children. And what ends up happening then at night, that's when all the things that I didn't get to do during the day get done."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs

The most frustrating thing was I never felt like I finished the day, I would just kind of like, drift away from the computer, because there's no end points, really."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs.

The weekends don't become any easier. It's just like 24/7."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs.

So I often get these meetings that are, you know, 6am Central time to talk to a customer...that's a piece that I can't totally parse out. I'm like, would you have asked me for a 6am Central time meeting if the world was normal? I kind of doubt it."

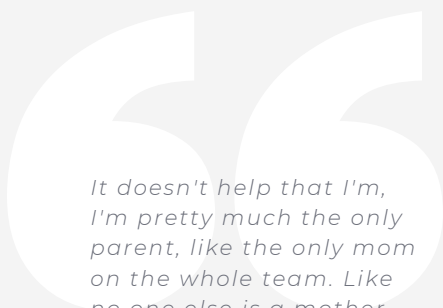
-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs

THE POWER OF MOM NETWORKS

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Having moms as co-workers and managers has had a tremendous impact on making this last year of work more manageable for moms.

For those who are not a mom, despite best efforts, it is difficult to understand what being a mom entails, especially during a global health crisis. That is why having other moms as both co-workers and organizational leaders has been a critical work factor for moms this past year. There is a "power in numbers"- the more moms there are within a team or organization, the more normalized working motherhood (and all that it entails) becomes. Moms with other mom co-workers feel less of a need to hide their identity as a mother and feel encouraged knowing that colleagues may be experiencing similar struggles. However, despite what may feel like a cultural shift over this past year to greater acceptance of kids hopping on Zoom calls, many moms still express a different sentiment. In particular, they note being questioned by colleagues about the amount of time they step away to tend to their children or blocking off times on their calendars designated for virtual learning



It doesn't help that I'm, I'm pretty much the only parent, like the only mom on the whole team. Like no one else is a mother. That is a very big deal. No one really understands the dynamic I am going through."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs

It is hard for people who either don't have kids, or who don't have similar aged kids to remember what it's like, when they are at home. You can't just you know, give them a device and feel good about it and continue working."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs

I'm in the telecommunications/tech industry surrounded by younger people without spouses or kids. I feel alone and unable to connect with coworkers on the extra stressors I'm dealing with at this time surrounding childcare availability and just fears in general."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs

I have a block from 12:30 to 1:30 on my calendar, my boss has even questioned me about it. And I'm like, 'I'm not taking that out.' Like, no, I spend time with my kids during that time."

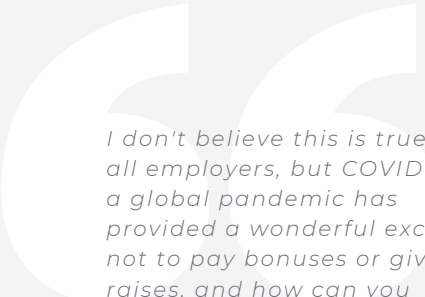
-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs.

FEAR & HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

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Normalizing working motherhood has moms hopeful, but the impact to career advancement also ignites fears.

Moms are hopeful that this last year of work has shined a light on how work and home life are not two separate entities, especially for those with children. Home life impacts work and vice versa. The two do not occur in isolation and the quicker organizations can support integration of the two, the happier and more productive they'll find not just mom employees, but all employees. However, in terms of their careers, moms are incredibly fearful of the impact COVID-19 has had on women, in particular their career progression and pay equity. Many feel that they are pressing pause and having to settle significantly more often than anyone else. Though with limited hours in the day they feel that there is no alternative, but instead just hope that organizations who may have previously had an "up or out" philosophy, recognize that "up" may just not be an option right now.



I don't believe this is true with all employers, but COVID and a global pandemic has provided a wonderful excuse not to pay bonuses or give raises, and how can you argue? How can you say I've earned an increase when they show you company results that are off 60% year over year, even though you know, your individual performance is worthy of it? And I think this effect, this will be worse for women."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs

Right now I'm just taking contract positions, but the salary is less than I was making in 2005, having five years or 10 years of experience. And that just seems to be where we are right now."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs.

Women get put in positions where they accept jobs that are either below their skillset or below their pay requirement is a theme that I'm seeing left and right, where I have friends who have had to leave the workplace because of the pandemic, and now schools are somewhat open and they need to get back they've got to earn money, and they're like 'I'll take anything.'"

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs.

If not for coronavirus, I would have made a move to a new company. Because of instability with school and childcare options, for now, I am staying at a less than ideal company and with a disappointing manager. The idea of voluntarily adding a new job into the mix is a level of stress and uncertainty we can't bear during the pandemic."

-Mom interviewed by WerkLabs



WerkLabs

Powering Employee Experience

Led by Dr. Pam Cohen, WerkLabs is comprised of a team of experienced researchers with backgrounds in social psychology, behavioral economics, and human behavior. Integrating qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, WerkLabs advises on topics such as Flexible Work Structures, DE&I, Policy Optimization, and Team Effectiveness.

Interested in learning how WerkLabs can support your workforce?

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