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Export date: Fri Oct 30 8:26:59 2026 / +0000 GMT

Working from home

by BRIAN LOCKHART

The media was filled with stories and interviews from top officials this past week encouraging to people to ?continue to work from home.'

The obvious reasoning is if you aren't going into work you won't be spreading the COVID-19 virus to your office space.

That sounds great, coming from a bunch of people whose world revolves around an office type environment in downtown Toronto. What seemed to be lacking in the directive is the understanding that for many, probably most people across Ontario, working from home is not an option.

While the directive is well-intentioned, it simply is not practical for most people who want to continue to earn a pay cheque.

Some companies have adapted quite well to a home based environment ? at least for the time being.

One major radio station I listen to on a regular basis has equipped all their hosts with the ability to broadcast from home, and it's working quite well.

This new home-based working environment is a relatively new concept and is only practical for some people based on the ability to transmit electronic information via e-mail and the internet. In the case of the radio station, the ability to utilize modern technology allows them to send out broadcasts over the airways in a way that would not have been possible just 30 years ago.

Prior to internet availability, the only people who could really work from home were those who were self employed and had a home based business and office.

However, what if your work is that of a more practical hands-on nature?

I'm not sure receiving instructions via Skype from your dentist on how to drill and fill that problem tooth will work to your advantage, no matter how thoroughly your dentist explains the procedure.

The list of people who can't work from home is huge.

That list includes pretty much everyone working in the trades and related business. I can't think of a single trade where you could accomplish the job from a home office.

The entire transportation industry, and that includes the big rigs that distribute food across the continent, is based on getting out there and doing the job. If truck drivers decided to stay home, we would be in trouble very soon as supply lines dried up.

Not only would you not be able to find an apple in the grocery store, good luck getting parts for your car or a new part for your refrigerator or furnace.

Prior to leaving the warehouse, that new alternator you need for your car needs to be manufactured. While the engineers who design them may be able to get away with working from home, the people who actually build them can't. That includes machinists and anyone involved in putting an alternator together, and the people who work on the loading dock and get them in the trucks for delivery.

That new car you've been hoping to buy because the old clunker is just about ready to give up, isn't built by people in their home

garage. It is assembled by a lot of people who need to go into work to get the job done.

I've heard many people say they envy those that can work from home. Just think ? no commute, no getting dressed up for the job ? just walk down the hall to your home office and start your day.

That may sound ideal to some, but the reality for many people is that their life at work is a big part of their social experience.

When you're working from home on a daily basis, those four walls in your home office can close in on you pretty fast. Distractions come easily and frequently.

Part of the experience of working outside of your home is the social interaction with co-workers, clients, and visitors to your place of business.

For many, those daily interactions make life interesting.

Mental health experts have been warning that the current ?stay at home' directives have been impacting the ability of some people to cope with isolation. Especially those who are already experiencing mental health issues.

People who have such issues can thrive on meeting other people and just getting out there and being part of society.

Working at home is a temporary solution to a temporary problem.

The sooner we get back to regular social interaction, the better it will be for all of us.