

# Putting a stride in your step as we bounce back from the pandemic

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The past year has been one of challenge and change that no-one has escaped. Well-oiled working practices have been ripped up and while some have been lucky enough to keep their jobs, others have not been so fortunate.

Earlier this year Business Daily Group's rail business RBD expanded its growing service portfolio with a unique collaborative alliance with one of the UK's leading rail and construction recruitment specialists – Stride Resourcing.

Known as **RBDStride**, the partnership offers contingent recruitment plus specific candidate search and selection services for all leadership, management and operational grades across Britain's railway projects.

Lewis Salter joined the company in August to develop its presence within the rail market and is now helping keep the railways moving and its people in jobs with a wide range of opportunities. As lockdown eases and the light at the end of the tunnel is ever closer, he's written the article below about the return to work and if there are any positives that can be taken from the last year.

## **Relying on video calls**

"I personally have always enjoyed face to face interactions with clients and candidates as I find the personal element of the job to be one of the most satisfying. During COVID, such meeting haven't been possible and instead have been replaced by Teams calls.

Although there is no denying the efficiency of jumping on a quick Teams call, I miss getting the early train to London with a line-up of back-to-back meetings scheduled for the day. Having to get on busy tubes at peak times in London is something I am surprised to say I've missed.

I can quite happily conduct my business comfortably on Teams, but I know others have been a lot more impacted. I have friends that work within engagement positions and they have had to adjust from holding weekly meetings with local authorities and stakeholders at local church halls to the virtual world and this, no doubt, has been a lot more difficult.

There are also the distractions around when on a Teams call - from the doorbell ringing through to the dog barking. I'll hold my hands up, I find myself being distracted at times by various happenings around the house or office. But there are also the benefits. I love the fact that I can schedule in a call with a client or candidate at short notice and within minutes have them on my laptop screen and we are talking business.

Yet I know others who are quite the other way. I know that travelling for some has been significantly reduced. You don't have people turning up or running late for meetings due to traffic or transport delays.

## **Meeting you colleagues virtually**

Two years ago, it would have been unheard for an Operations Manager to have been working for a company for almost a year and not having met any of their colleagues, or for a Construction Manager to have been running a rail site from their home office for the past 10 months.

This is common now and I suppose what I'm wondering is whether this will remain standard practice once restrictions are lifted and we aren't governed by such constraints. Will the new technology that has proven so beneficial in recent times be utilised in the same capacity or will we resume business as normal once we are able?

I have always been someone who has enjoyed putting a face to a name. A person that feels the benefit of being in a room with someone I have built a relationship with over the phone and cementing that in person.

I know others that are more than happy to keep and maintain that relationship via phone calls and emails. It is very much dependent on the person and their own preference. The job role and the purpose of the call or meeting is no doubt going to play an important factor in things moving forward. Anyway, that's me and enough about me.

## **The interview process**

I have held and booked many interviews during this period and they have gone as well and as badly as you could hope. I've seen candidates in shirts and ties looking seemingly dressed for the occasion until their child walks in, revealing that they've been wearing tracksuit bottoms the whole time.

I've had intermittent Wi-Fi issues causing interviews to be missed and most recently and unfortunately, I've had candidate's connection interrupted mid-psychometric test causing several sections of the test to be missed resulting on them losing out on jobs.

I suppose it's all part and parcel of the world we have had to adjust to over the past year. There's been some good, some bad and some very much in between. I always like to focus on the positives and the connectivity it has brought us has been astronomical.

In terms of the interview process, I think similarly it has benefits and also weaknesses. On an efficiency basis, travel time is reduced of course as the trip to your work station at home is considerably less than a respective new office. But on the flip side can you get the feel for your new boss or new hire virtually – sitting across a table and discussing an exciting opportunity and visiting the office where you will hopefully be taking the next step in your career?

### **Productivity**

I haven't spoken to many people who have many complaints on the impact to output. I personally have been fortunate enough to remain working in the office throughout. I know full well that my productivity in the office environment is far superior to what I can achieve working from home.

However, I have spoken to others who find working from home to have far less distractions and, therefore, output has significantly been increased. On a practical basis, I know of people that have been able to save themselves two hours a day in commute time and thousands of pounds in childcare.

Does work need to be conducted in the office? Pros and cons are obvious, but will we see a more flexible working approach moving forward? I think the obvious answer is yes.

### **Coming out the other side**

On a recruitment basis, as we begin to come out the other side of this, what I have noticed is a range of new obstacles to overcome. I have spoken with candidates who have barely left the house in almost a year and have developed travel anxiety, meaning they can now only work from home.

I have spoken to others who no longer want to take roles that will require travel via public transport due to concerns over COVID – despite the evidence to suggest you'd be pretty unfortunate to contract the virus whilst doing so.

I have spoken to candidates who were looking to move but now have a new sense of loyalty to their employer after they have handled the situation so well.

Job satisfaction seems to have increased somewhat due to the flexibility offered by some employers and in

other circumstances has made people want to leave roles from employers who haven't been so accommodating.

Other questions have been raised around transitioning back into working practices such as will large work sites require vaccine passports or proof of vaccination before they will be allowed back to work? And if so, what will be the effects of this as a lot of people refuse to have it?

All we can do is adapt to our post-COVID world as best as possible and I for one am feeling confident and positive that working practices and performance will not be affected and, if anything, enhanced but we shall see."

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