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Changing Work

Until now, companies, not employees, have been in control. There has been a surplus of workers, and companies have been able to call the shots about where people work and when. But the world of work is dramatically shifting. There is a huge shortage of talent coming.[1] What makes me say that? The population is growing, not shrinking, so why will we be faced with a talent shortage? Studies show that the supply of people able to understand and respond to business challenges will fall short of the rising demand for business change and growth. In Silicon Valley, and elsewhere, we have more technical jobs and fewer students graduating with the technical chops we need. We need deeper technical skills in order to keep up and remain competitive.

Work as we know it is such an oxymoron: we have record unemployment, yet companies can't find enough of the right talent. Some 22 percent of employers reported that despite an abundant labor pool, they still have positions for which they can't find qualified candidates. Some 48 percent of HR managers said that there was an area of their organization in which they lacked qualified workers.[2] The war for talent will do nothing but accelerate.

In a "do or die" economy, it's clear that companies that take a critical look at their traditional business practices and adopt more

agile work models will be better equipped for the long haul. At the same time, with Millennials graduating and entering a brutal job market while Baby Boomers cannot afford to retire, competition has never been so stiff. This is further proof that evolving beyond the traditional models of work is becoming essential for survival. Workers who have the right skills and operate with a mind-set that they are CEOs of their own destinies are best positioned to be in high demand and will be afforded the most choice.

There's a lot of talk about having it all. And, quite frankly, I wish I could have done it all: I wish I could have stayed close to my family, seen them more often, and also have had an exciting and lucrative career that put meat and potatoes on the table. I did not see many choices available to me thirty years ago when I made my own career decisions.

But today, given the incredible advances in technology and the amazing way in which the world is connected, you have more choices. It is your responsibility to seize the opportunity by embracing the technological tools available to you. You can do more than you've ever dreamed. I call this thinking the Spirit of "And." Today, we no longer have to think in terms of either-or. We can have great family and personal lives AND have great careers. And many entrepreneurs with new technologies, companies, and services are enabling this phenomenon—many because they wanted to benefit from it as well.

The opportunity in front of us is exciting. It's inspiring. And it's going to continue. When things are out of whack, they are most ripe for disruption. It's also a time when immense value can be created. There has always been a gold rush to new frontiers, and time and again we've seen the way that uncertain times inspire young companies, leading them to replace and quickly exceed the value of old companies. What do Southwest, Cisco,

and salesforce.com all have in common? They were all started in times that were difficult—in times that needed fixing—the exact time when we need innovation and the exact time when it flourishes.

I understand that change is hard. People resist disrupting the status quo. When we first built the railroads in this country, no one would ride, afraid their bodies would explode. I'm not asking you to hop on a runaway train, but I am asking you to think differently about work and to urge others to join you for the ride.

FREELANCE NATION 2.0

When I began my career, everyone "went" to work. It was long before the advent of the Internet and personal computers; you had to go to work to gain access to computing power. Only very select people could participate in remote access programs. Most computer centers had people on call 24/7. When there was a problem, they had to drive to the office and fix the problem on-site. There was no such thing as logging on remotely. Employees had to be at their desks to do work. Our inboxes were paper based. We had written phone memos, not voicemail, so in order to receive a call, we had to be at work. There weren't PCs that could be disconnected and taken home. People brought disks back and forth. At that time, it wasn't firewalls that protected the network; it was office walls, and if you weren't inside the office, you weren't able to work. The idea of "office hours" actually made sense. Today it's an outdated idea.

When I was building my career, I went west to Silicon Valley, and I still believe in the magic that makes it an epicenter of innovation. The pioneering companies that were founded there, the access to venture capital, the proximity to

world-class universities with incredible engineering departments, and the amazing weather have given Silicon Valley an edge. Entrepreneurs are drawn to it, and for many it makes good sense to relocate there. There are of course other unique locales that draw workers for certain industries, such as Los Angeles for the entertainment industry or New York for finance. These places still reign as special, but they are edge cases. More and more, thanks to the Internet, videoconferencing, and mobile devices, you can be anywhere and do your job. Where you work can now be more of a choice. Some places still make good common sense—and will for some time—but the connections we can make through technology open up more choices for all of us.

Today people are moving around for jobs, but unlike in the past, they're not moving from location to location but from one job to another (sometimes in the course of a day). This is a growing trend. In December 2009, the number of people who declared themselves self-employed for "economic reasons" (citing "slack work" or "business conditions") more than doubled from pre-recession levels and reached almost 1.2 million.[3] A report based on research from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology estimated that freelance positions are expected to make up half of all new jobs added during the economic recovery.[4] However, this increase in freelancing is not all spurred by a down economy.

Federal statistics dating back to 2005 show that even at that time, one-third of the workforce (more than forty-two million Americans) already had part-time or temporary jobs. The same stats show that more than ten million were independent contractors.[5] This phenomenon has been brewing for some time—since the 1970s, according to Sara Horowitz of Freelancers Union. "What the recession shows is that people are just following the work," she says.[6]

In the future, it will make more sense to work on a project-by-project basis, similar to how crews work on movies: the best team is organized, and it is made up of individuals who work together for a set period of time and then, upon completion of the project, go their separate ways. In many industries, people will gain the opportunity to have many different jobs and many different employers, and therefore achieve much more personal freedom.

Although analysts have long viewed a "mobile workforce" as an economic strength, what is meant by that term needs to be updated and redefined. The mobile workforce I believe in is not made up of people moving to a different city or state to find work, but of people working from wherever they want. So, you can stay where you are or go where you want and still find the work that best suits you and your family. It may not be within driving distance—in fact, it may be better if it's not. The average person wastes the equivalent of eight weeks a year commuting. Imagine what we can do if we claim those weeks back. Even on the most micro level, we can eliminate one of the most stressful parts of every workday.

GETTING TO GREEN

Aside from the benefits that companies can unlock with new methods of working, and the increased peace and fulfillment those methods can bring individuals, there's additional room and reason for change: the environment.

We're pretty much all now in agreement that global warming isn't a conspiracy theory but a real problem for the future health of our planet. Scientists, engineers, and citizens are exploring ways to solve it, ranging from electric cars to renewable energy to

geoengineering, but somehow we overlook changing something that is right in front of all of us. Our traditional model of work isn't just suffocating us; it's spewing hundreds of millions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere every year and negatively impacting the planet.

Two-thirds of the electricity load in the United States is consumed by offices, according to the U.S. Green Business Council. Offices account for about 38 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions, and much of the office space we have is unoccupied. (Alternatively, home energy is much cheaper and much better utilized.) This is a growing problem. Over approximately the next twenty years, greenhouse gas emissions from offices are expected to grow faster than those in any other sector—about 1.8 percent per year.[7]

Commuting—something none of us enjoy anyway—is a big culprit as well. American workers spend on average forty minutes a day commuting (this equates to eight weeks a year spent in the car). In total this wastes more than 3.7 billion hours and 2.3 billion gallons of gas in one year.[8] What a toll for something most of us don't like doing—sitting in traffic!

I'm not a climatologist, so when it comes to really fixing the environmental crisis, I don't know if the answer rests on solar, wind, geothermal, nuclear, or some genius combination of these and new technologies yet to be discovered. But I do know that we can stop adding to the problem, simply by changing the outdated way we work. If we leverage today's technologies so that we don't need to commute and then log in endless hours in climate-controlled office parks, we could massively reduce our negative impact on the environment.

It's good news all around. As the carbon footprint gets smaller, the cost to businesses goes down as well. Real estate

is expensive. The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) finds the cost of accommodating the average federal worker to be $10,000 to $15,000 annually and that eliminating one hundred work spaces could save an organization more than $1 million a year.[9] Some companies have found ways to reduce their space and save costs. Unisys reduced its real estate costs by 87 percent through telecommuting (workshifting). About 25 percent of IBM's worldwide workers telecommute from home offices, saving the company $700 million in real estate costs.[10] Even the government is getting on board. By leveraging teleworking and "office hoteling," the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office got rid of three floors of office work space, and by enabling lawyers to reserve space in advance (allowing roughly five workers to share one office) the agency saves approximately $1.5 million annually in office rental costs.[11]

There was a telecommuting movement in the 1990s that gained popularity but ultimately resulted in failures. At that time, the technology was not yet advanced enough to support hoteling or desk sharing, and getting work done was inefficient. Today, new technology that allows increased collaboration remotely is powering this trend, and this movement is also being boosted by a new green consciousness.

There's much brouhaha about "green jobs," or those that arise from new clean-tech companies, created to help solve the climate crisis. I'm all for this—we need this kind of innovation, but the problem is that green jobs are hardly the economic cure-all they are often made out to be, as they account for only a small fraction of the U.S. workforce.

What about taking a different approach to green jobs? We can change the way people work to make all jobs more green and pursue this on a mass level. Everyone can make her job

more "green" just by making a few changes that she'd probably prefer, such as working from home a few days a week. Even if you want to keep office space, there are ways to use it much more efficiently. Studies by the U.S. General Services Administration show that at any given time, over half the workspace in the United States and Europe is not being used. During typical working hours—between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM—space is being used at only 35 to 50 percent of full capacity.[12] Companies that wise up to this reality win. We can start small, but even eliminating some of our dependence on office buildings will have a profound effect on our lives both in and out of business.

We are beginning to make incredible advances. As many of the millions of freelancers, independent contractors, at-home workers, and even traditional employees will tell you, getting a better job no longer requires picking up and moving to a new geography; it just involves adopting a new mind-set. Companies too are embracing change. IBM has evolved far beyond the company I once knew that had me moving back and forth throughout the country. As of 2011, 39 percent of IBM's employees worked from some type of a remote environment. It's a trend that's growing: IBM increased its 4:1 staff-to-desk ratio to an average of 12:1.[13]