

# For new hires, remote work brings challenges, opportunities

September 10 2021, by Urooba Jamal

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Sonya Barlow, right, CEO of Like Minded Females Network, speaks to Rebekah Ingram, her intern, at White Mulberries, a coffee shop in London, Thursday, Sep. 2, 2021. Many young workers around the world have entered the workforce and begun their careers during the pandemic working entirely remotely. Like Minded Females Network is a social enterprise that helps young women set up businesses and other ventures, without the use of a fixed office space. Credit: AP Photo/Urooba Jamal

Rebekah Ingram's remote internship has come with a series of unexpected challenges: She lacks a proper office set-up, her mother often calls for her while she works, and her dog barks during video calls.

Her situation will sound familiar to anyone who has worked from home during the coronavirus pandemic. The difference for Ingram is that she, like many other [young people](#) who started jobs in the past 18 months, hasn't spent any time in a traditional office. She speculates that [remote work](#) is "way more informal."

"It's kind of trippy because ... you're working but ... you're in your own environment," said the 22-year-old, who is interning at Like Minded Females Network, a global tech and entrepreneurship non-profit based in London.

Many 2020 graduates left school and entered a world in turmoil, with limited job prospects. Some lost work opportunities as companies canceled internships or froze hiring altogether. As restrictions have eased in many places, jobs have become easier to find, but work remains far from normal.

Most of all, many [young workers](#) say, they know they're missing out when their office is the four walls of their bedroom. They wish they had more chances for everyday social interactions with their colleagues, both to build camaraderie and to find mentors.

Sohini Sengupta, 22, had an easy transition to remote work because she was used to doing it at school, but she feels she lacks a sense of community at her job.

"When I started working, I took a look at my workplace's website and I could see photos of them taking trips together, enjoying themselves at the pool table at the office ... something I had no chance to experience,"

said Sengupta, who lives in Calcutta, India, and is working as a production trainee at India Today, a media outlet based in New Delhi.



Sonya Barlow, left, CEO of Like Minded Females Network, speaks to Rebekah Ingram, her intern, at White Mulberries, a coffee shop in London, Thursday, Sep. 2, 2021. Many young workers around the world have entered the workforce and begun their careers during the pandemic working entirely remotely. Like Minded Females Network is a social enterprise that helps young women set up businesses and other ventures, without the use of a fixed office space. Credit: AP Photo/Urooba Jamal

Annabel Redgate, 25, a public relations account executive at PR agency TANK in Nottingham, England, began her current job in February.



When pandemic-related restrictions began lifting a few months ago, she started to reach out to colleagues to meet for drinks after work. Now TANK has begun a staggered return to the office, and it's the social atmosphere she's most looking forward to.

"PR is a very personal industry, so I'm excited for the atmosphere in the office," she said.

For Maya Goldman, a 23-year old health reporter based in Washington, D.C., beginning her career remotely has meant struggling to set boundaries for herself, a process she figures she would have seen modeled by her bosses if she had been working in the office.

It was "hard to figure out ... when was appropriate to tell my bosses that I was done for the night, or when I should take lunch, and how long I should take lunch for," Goldman said.

Many employers are conscious of the need to help new remote workers feel welcome.

At 9 every morning, employees at Trevelino/Keller, a marketing firm in Atlanta, participate in "Spotify at 9," where they all play the same song and talk about it on Slack. They've also held book clubs and watched TED talks virtually.

It's part of an effort to make sure "while you're waking up every day in your first career remotely, you feel like you're part of a company and you're part of our culture," said Dean Trevelino, co-founder of the firm.



Sonya Barlow, CEO of Like Minded Females Network, takes a call at WeWork, a co-operative work space in London, Thursday, Sep. 2, 2021. Many young workers around the world have entered the workforce and begun their careers during the pandemic working entirely remotely. Like Minded Females Network is a social enterprise that helps young women set up businesses and other ventures, without the use of a fixed office space. Credit: AP Photo/Urooba Jamal

Liza Streiff, CEO at Knopman Marks Financial Training, a financial education company in New York, recently held a barbecue at her place, the first in-person event for the company since the pandemic.

Many of her employees were meeting in person for the first time. It was two of the youngest workers—an intern and another worker who

recently joined full-time following an internship—who told Streiff "how much this meant to them."

Companies are also helping employees take advantage of mentoring opportunities they may feel they're missing out on.

Trevelino/Keller, Like Minded Females Network, and Knopman Marks have all implemented buddy programs during the pandemic, pairing new hires with more senior employees they can turn to for advice and help navigating their companies.

Not all new employees feel they're missing out by working remotely. Many have found it easier to juggle work and life when they don't have to commute to an office every day.

For Matthew Toale, a marketing apprentice at Find Your Flex, a U.K.-based job agency, the pandemic shift to remote work had another benefit—it made networking more comfortable. As an introvert, he struggled at events and has been far more successful at online networking.

Networking online "is a lot easier for me than jumping in headfirst into a face-to-face conversation," Toale said.



Sonya Barlow, left, CEO of Like Minded Females Network, talks during a meeting at White Mulberries, a coffee shop in London, Thursday, Sep. 2, 2021. Many young workers around the world have entered the workforce and begun their careers during the pandemic working entirely remotely. Like Minded Females Network is a social enterprise that helps young women set up businesses and other ventures, without the use of a fixed office space. Credit: AP Photo/Urooba Jamal

As the pandemic wanes, many companies may allow employees to continue working from home, at least some of the time.

Mabel Abraham, a professor at Columbia Business School, says there's no data available yet on the possible ramifications of so many young workers starting careers remotely. She said some may experience a

disconnect with bosses and other older co-workers who have had a harder time adapting to remote work.

But Suneet Dua, chief product officer at accounting giant PwC U.S., the accounting firm giant, suspects the impact will be positive, both in building resilience and adaptability in young workers as well as technological advances that have been made to allow remote work.

"That's the biggest benefit for our society that we can ever imagine that we're not even seeing right now," he said. "(What) we're going to see in three to five years is going to be amazing."

There's also been some buzz about remote work offering more opportunities for diversity, but Abraham cautions that it can actually heighten workplace inequalities. That's because it may create a divide between newly hired employees from different backgrounds who may live far away and a core group of existing workers who live closer and will eventually return to the office.

The core workers "tend to be a more homogenous group, maybe more male or more white for example," she said.

Sonya Barlow, founder of the Like Minded Females Network, hires people based on skills rather than their resume or experience, mindful of the barriers to entry that some groups can face in the corporate world.





Rebekah Ingram, an intern at Like Minded Females Network, works on her laptop at WeWork, a co-operative work space in London, Thursday, Sep. 2, 2021. Many young workers around the world have entered the workforce and begun their careers during the pandemic working entirely remotely. Like Minded Females Network is a social enterprise that helps young women set up businesses and other ventures, without the use of a fixed office space. Credit: AP Photo/Urooba Jamal

"I tend to hire people who are fresh graduates or and have taken alternative education routes," Barlow said.

One of those hires was Ingram, who was working at a grocery store when the pandemic began but dreamed of starting her own business.

Over the last few weeks, Ingram has finally had a chance to meet Barlow face-to-face, working alongside her in a co-working space or meeting with clients in coffeeshops. She's found it refreshing to get away from her home office and is hoping to build the skills she'll need to become an independent business owner.

"I would love to just get everything I can out of this internship," she said.

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