I believe the four day workweek will become standard during our lifetimes (say, within 30 - 50 years). Makes the most sense.

Thanks for the story!

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7 Ways to Do a Workweek

Monday through Friday isn’t for everyone

With many physical offices closed for the foreseeable future, the regular workweek has seldom seemed like a more artificial construct for office workers. Commutes have been replaced by a short amble to the desk, if you aren’t just tapping away on your laptop from the heights of Mount Duvet. And the “weekend,” especially for those without children, has become a rather abstract concept.

With the world in flux, it’s not surprising that the shape of the workweek is shifting too. It wouldn’t be the first time. After the French Revolution, the government implemented a radical calendar: From 1793 to 1805, French workers operated on a 10-day week with one full day and one half day off. Stalin tried something similar: For 11 years, the Soviet Union had no weekends, working a five-day “continuous week” with staggered days off.

Obviously neither of those systems had staying power, and few would welcome similar state-mandated shifts in the workweek today. But there's also no need for us to be so universally wedded to the five-days-on, two-days-off workweek. It’s a vestige of early 20th-century industrial labor, a far cry from the realities of the modern connected workplace. Technology has allowed us to be productive on our own time, yet somehow we’re still committed to that structure of a 40-hour week.

It doesn’t have to be that way. Remote work has given us more options for flexibility than
ever before — and many are learning that one size doesn’t fit all. Now is a great time to consider whether the Monday-through-Friday workweek is truly right for you, or whether another structure works better for your needs and rhythms. Here are some options.

1. The four-day workweek

It sounds like a fantasy: full pay, full work output, and 80% as much time chained to your computer. It’s a relatively new concept, but the little data that exists on the four-day week is very promising. In early 2018, a New Zealand company called Perpetual Guardian ran an eight-week experiment with its 240 employees. Workers would set out to accomplish the same work for the same pay — with three days off rather than two.

The results were striking: Workers were more productive, more efficient, and happier. Two years on, the company has a permanent option of a four-day workweek (though the company retains the right to “withdraw” the extra day off if employees aren’t getting their work done). Since then, founder Andrew Barnes reports, revenue has increased by 6% and profitability by 12.5%. “This is a work revolution whose time has come,” Barnes wrote in.

If you think that it could be the right option for you, try pitching it to your boss, but make sure you’ve given some careful thought ahead of time to exactly how it would work. First, consider who else it could affect and how your new schedule might affect everybody else on your time. Then, be prepared for tricky questions.

2. The early start

If you’re at your sharpest while the sun is still low in the sky, go with that instinct. Working from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. could be a fantastic way to maximize productivity and make the most of your early-bird body clock. While the rest of the world wakes up, you’ll have the quiet you need to focus and get a head start on the day’s tasks without interruptions from chatty colleagues or demanding clients. By the time your first morning Zoom calls starts, you’ll be prepared and hopefully in the right headspace.

There are other advantages: According to researchers from the University of Washington, managers often display a bias toward early birds. Even when total work hours were the same, employees who began earlier were consistently rated as better performers and more conscientious.

Working a slightly different schedule could give you more time to spend with nonworking members of your family. And outside of a pandemic, it’s also a sure-fire way of escaping rush hour traffic.

3. The 21-hour week
You probably can’t just march into your boss’s office and ask them to halve your hours. But if you’re considering going part-time and are able to take a pay cut, the benefits are huge: Voluntary part-time workers are often happier and feel better able to take care of themselves and their families.

In heterosexual couples, there’s a strong feminist argument for both partners to work part-time, if it’s financially feasible, in order to engage more equally in the emotional and physical labor of running a household and shared life. Women in the U.K. spend an average of 16.8 hours a week in paid work and 29.75 hours in unpaid work according to data from Eurostat. For men, the numbers are reversed at 29.16 hours of paid work and 16.1 hours unpaid. Balancing out the discrepancy could lead to a more equal sharing of childcare and other responsibilities, making it easier for women to succeed.

It’s one reason why the think tank New Economics Foundation has proposed a 21-hour week as the standard for the 21st century. They argue that it’s best for everyone: As well as creating more gender equality, it would help countries to decarbonize by cutting down on commutes, spread labor and resources more evenly, and make workers happier and more productive.

4. The five-hour workday

If you’re able to manage your own time, there’s no reason to be “on” for the standard eight-hour day. Digital marketer Felicia Sullivan advocates for working smarter rather than harder or longer. By gut-renovating her own workweek, she has managed to maintain a cool five-hour workday, five days a week. “I don’t get less done,” she writes. “I just do it in less time, freeing myself up for the things that matter.”

Her own strategies involve confining phone calls to Thursday and Tuesdays, and avoiding task-switching at all costs. Sullivan also automates as many processes as possible.

One nonnegotiable part of her workday is a morning walk, Sullivan writes: “I take my walks in silence, free of distraction, because I know the rest of my day will be filled with noise. That lone hour gets my body moving, my head ready, and my heart anxious to dive into the work I absolutely love — in healthy moderation.”

5. The seven-day workweek

It sounds terrible, but hear me out: For some people, working a few hours every day can solve the conundrum of the pandemic weekend.

“When the world was put on lockdown, weekends quickly started to feel exactly like weekdays, only with less work and stimuli,” wrote Stephen Moore in. “And I started feeling off. I was anxious, unsatisfied, bored.”
For Moore, waking up early on Saturday and Sunday to get in a few hours of work before lunch put a stop to 48 hours of “Netflix and doomscrolling,” he said. And it has done wonders for his mental health: “Working on the weekends actually helps me relax — when my workday is over, I can be fully off, knowing that I spent my morning being productive.”

This could work for some people even during non-pandemic times. More than 70% of American workers check their work email outside of office hours. If you’re already working far beyond your office hours, why not embrace it? That might mean working 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on weekdays and then slotting in eight hours of work spread over the weekend.

6. The 30-hour workweek

It’s easier to make the case for a 30-hour workweek than you might anticipate. That’s the lesson from one long-ranging Swedish study, where nurses at a Swedish retirement home were put on six-hour shifts with an eight-hour salary.

On the face of it, nursing seems like one of the professions least suited to a shorter workday. Patients often need support around the clock, and medical care can’t generally be rushed. But the retirement home found that its bottom line was barely affected, even after taking on more nurses to cover the extra hours. Over a year, nurses on the new schedule took half as much sick time and were almost three times less likely to take time off in a given two-week period. More than that, they were happier and more focused.

Those are the points to lead with if you’re considering proposing it to your employer: that with this new schedule, you’ll be a more productive, more satisfied employee. That’s a change that’s as helpful for them as it is for you.

7. The classic five and two

Love working 9 to 5, Monday to Friday? Great! If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.

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