

When you see the stone coming, it hurts less

By [Richard Lewis](#), issued by [Dentsu](#)

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Sitting beside the main road in Penrith, England is the little noticed and unloved Plague Stone. The story it tells is as fascinating as it is sad. In 1597 the Plague struck in Penrith.



Normal life in the town was suspended as the disease tore through the population. Farmers living around Penrith were too terrified of the plague to risk bringing their goods to market, resulting in serious food shortages to compound the townsfolk's problems. Plague stones were set up around the outskirts of the town. These stones had a hollow filled with vinegar, in which townsfolk left coins and retreated a safe distance. Farmers then brought food and left it by the stone and took the disinfected money as payment.

The plague finally released its grip after 15 months having killed almost half of the population of the town. Such plague stones were quite common around England, but few now remain.

This is one of many examples of how society has been forced to change its ways in the face of adversity. The word "pivot" it being thrown around in almost every Zoom, Skype or Teams call held at present – and pivot we all must.

The notion of mandatory daily employee attendance in a formal office environment should already be obsolete – and sadly it has taken a virus and subsequent global pandemic to prove this to many employers around the world.

In a recent presentation from Richard Mulholland, co-founder of South Africa's first Perspective Lab on Legacide – he summed this up well, stating *"This truly is a time where organisations need to unpack whether their values are a poster on a wall or a pathway for success for their employees."* With many preaching agility and employee centricity – sadly most fail at the first hurdle to empower their employees to live these values.

Global studies have revealed that office bound employees are [less engaged](#), waste valuable time in the office when they should be [working](#) as well as concerns around employee performance continued to be experienced, despite the presence of management in the space. You will struggle to find any studies that prove otherwise.

Remote working, or telecommuting, certainly isn't a new concept – with the number of people who work remotely at least once a week having grown by [400% since 2010](#). A recent Harris Poll study commissioned by [Zapier](#) amongst over 880 U.S. knowledge workers (people working in a professional setting who use a computer as part of their role) showed that 74% of the respondents would be willing to quit a job that didn't allow remote working – for one that did.

The benefits for employees are obvious – from saving money on travel expenses and the ability to spend more time with family, increased productivity and physical fitness, to the simple things like being able to spend more time at home with your children and your pets.

Studies have also proven that around 82% of telecommuters have lower stress levels than in-house workers.

What many employers will be learning very quickly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic – is the direct benefits to their staff in the short term, and their bottom lines longer down the line:

- A physical office restricts your business to hiring the best person within a reasonable commute to and from the office. Remote teams can hire the best person they can afford from anywhere in the world.
- Greater productivity with employees having the freedom to work at their own pace – with the knowledge they have a job to complete. The ability to source talent from various time-zones will help them stay productive at all hours of the day – and has also proven to reduce [absenteeism](#) in teams.
- Reduced overheads with business requiring less space, and less investment on that space. In addition to this massive savings on travel expenses and down-time.
- Better alignment with employees as companies are forced to relook their rationale of compensation for production rather than presence.
- Quicker and fewer meetings – with online meetings saving the average employee an hour a week.

Businesses who fail to embrace this change will surely fall by the wayside – and those who have been looking for a business case to trial remote working will surely have their answers in the coming days.

The fear for many landlords around the globe is that office blocks may ultimately face the same fate of the lowly Plague Stone, a remnant of a time past – soon also to be unnoticed and unloved.



About the Author

Richard Lewis is currently managing director of MKTG South Africa, a network agency of Dentsu Aegis SSA. Richard oversaw the launch of MKTG South Africa in March 2017 (rebranding from Crimson Room Communications) - and has been key in developing and positioning the brand in the local market, whilst driving collaboration with all partner Dentsu Aegis Agencies and clients alike. He is an experiential marketing specialist within the luxury and consumer goods industry - whose strengths and expertise includes BTL campaign management, brand experiences, strategic partnerships and events.

MKTG is a global network brand, specialising in lifestyle marketing via sport and entertainment, live experiences, retail marketing, enterprise/B2B engagement and sponsorship marketing.

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