

- Remote work has provided bosses and workers alike with an overdue opportunity to re-evaluate this ingrained presenteeism. We've long known presenteeism is problematic: it can cost a nation's economy tens of billions of dollars as sick people drag themselves into the office and infect others; it creates toxic environments that lead to overwork, as people putting in long hours piles pressure on everyone else to do the same.

*What do you think about this text?*

- Presenteeism has simply gone digital: people are working longer than ever, responding to emails and messages at all hours of the day to show how 'engaged' they are. And, as bosses call workers back into the office, evidence is mounting that we perhaps haven't moved the dial on presenteeism at all. So, despite what we know, why is presenteeism still so emphasised? Clinging to a presenteeism culture just favours those "who have the time to show up early and leave late". This can unfairly favour some workers over others – parents may have no choice but to leave early, for example.

*What do you think about this text?*

- Despite initial worries that the current vaccines may be less effective against the Delta variant, analyses suggest that both the AstraZeneca and the Pfizer-BioNTech jabs reduce hospitalisation rates by 92-96%. As many health practitioners have repeated, the risks of severe side effects from a vaccine are tiny in comparison to the risk of the disease itself.

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- While it is tempting to assume that anyone who refuses a vaccine holds the same beliefs, the fears of most vaccine hesitant people should not be confused with the bizarre theories of staunch anti-vaxxers. The vast majority of vaccine-hesitant people do not have a political agenda and are not committed to an anti-scientific cause: they are simply undecided about their choice to take the injection. The good news is that many people who were initially hesitant are changing their mind. "But even a delay is considered a threat to health because viral infections spread very quickly," says Razai.

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- This would have been problematic if we were still dealing with the older variants of the virus, but the higher transmissibility of the new Delta variant has increased the urgency of reaching as many people as quickly as possible. There is no easy solution, but health authorities can continue to provide easy-to-digest, accurate information address the major concerns. According to a recent report by Imperial College London's Institute of Global Health Innovation (IGHI), the major barriers continue to be patient's concerns about the side effects and the fears that the vaccines haven't been adequately tested.

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- Razai suggests that we need more education about the history of the vaccines' development. The use of mRNA in vaccines has been studied for decades, for instance – with long trials testing its safety. This meant the technique could be quickly adapted for the pandemic. "None of the technology that has been used would be in any way harmful because we have used these technologies in other areas in healthcare and research," Razai says.

*What do you think about this text?*

- Speaking from the Vatican for BBC Radio 4's Thought for the Day, the Pope talked of crises including the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and economic difficulties, and urged the world to respond to them with vision and radical decisions, so as not to "waste opportunities" that the current challenges present. "We can confront these crises by retreating into isolationism, protectionism and exploitation," the pontiff said, "or we can see in them a real chance for change." The Pope has frequently evoked the climate crisis in speeches, and in 2015 published an encyclical, or papal document, called *Laudato Si'* focusing on the issue. In the text, subtitled *On Care for our Common Home*, he decried environmental destruction, stressed the need to take mitigating measures and gave an unambiguous acceptance that climate change was largely manmade.

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- The Pope earlier this month, he gathered almost 40 faith leaders from across the world at the Vatican to sign a joint appeal calling on COP26 to stick to pledges on global warming, carbon neutrality and support for poorer nations to transition to clean energy. In return, the leaders committed to educating and informing their faithful about the climate emergency. There was an expectation that the Pope would attend the conference in Glasgow, telling journalists over the summer that his speech was being written. But at the last minute the Vatican announced that the 84-year-old pontiff would not be going, giving no reason.

*What do you think about this text?*

- In Singapore, where Eshan and his family live, children aged six and above are legally required to wear masks. But many kindergartens and pre-schools also strongly encourage the practice for younger children. It means that for roughly eight hours every weekday, except while eating, drinking, or napping, Eshan wears a disposable three-ply mask. The moment he's let out, however, he rips off his mask, shoving it into his pocket or thrusting into his grandmother's hands. Once, on a particularly bad day in July, he threw his mask on the ground and ran out the school gates.

*What do you think about this text?*

- There have been relatively few studies investigating mask-wearing in children, due to ethical and logistical challenges. Those few studies, which focused on the physical impact of masks on breathing, did not find any harmful effects. But the debate around the wider pros and cons has been heated. Proponents of mask-wearing argue that masks protect the wearer and those around them from Covid-19, and that the risk factors of the disease for young children should not be overlooked. Most

countries do not vaccinate children under 12, or only in exceptional cases, which leaves them comparatively exposed.

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- The good news is that mask-wearing has been linked to lower rates of Covid-19 in schools. For example, in the US state of North Carolina, where masking is compulsory for students above six, schools reported extremely low transmission rates – although more than 7,000 children and staff attended school while carrying the virus between March and June 2021, only 363 Covid-19 cases were found to have been caused as a result.

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- In another survey involving 169 elementary schools in Georgia, researchers found that when teachers and staff were required to wear masks, reported Covid-19 cases were 37% lower compared to schools without a mask mandate. "Masks provide an additional layer of protection against Covid-19 and have been shown to decrease the risk of getting the disease," says Annabelle de St. Maurice, an assistant professor of paediatrics at the University of California, Los Angeles. Of course, masking may not solely be responsible for reducing transmission. Other protective factors such as "personal hand hygiene, safe distancing, and whether an area is well-ventilated may play a part," says Mark Ng, an infectious disease specialist at Singhealth Polyclinics in Singapore.

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- But masks are an efficient and effective preventive measure, which is probably why many parents of young children in Singapore still stuck to it even after the island state raised the legal mask-wearing age to six last September. The initial ruling, imposed half a year earlier, required children over two to be masked. For Mimi Zainal, mother to two children aged three and five years old, the change in ruling made no difference. "I prefer the kids to wear masks... it gives me a peace of mind to know they are more protected," she says.

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- Some argue that even the jolliest pattern can't change one fundamental problem with masks: they hide half the face, and may make it harder to decode people's moods and feelings. Children begin to recognise basic emotions – happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and so on – from as early as 10 months of age, with development peaking around five or six years, says Kang Lee, a developmental psychologist at the University of Toronto. Being able to see faces in their entirety is a key part of such development and masking can hinder that process, he says: "We learn emotions mostly through the face." But other experts are skeptical of how much of an impediment masks really are.

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- A 2012 study found that children under the age of nine could still correctly pinpoint the emotions of the faces they were viewing, even if they couldn't see their mouths. And in an experiment conducted last year, Ruba and her colleague discovered that while masks slightly impaired children's ability to recognise sadness, anger, and fear, the overall effect was the same with sunglasses. "This is another piece of evidence to suggest that masks may not have such a negative impact on children's emotional development," she says. After all, people usually don't worry about wearing sunglasses around kids.

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- Eva Chen, a developmental psychologist at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, points out that in any case, people are not wearing masks or sunglasses all the time: "So children are not 100% deprived of facial information." And in places like China, South Korea, and Japan, where masking was commonplace even before the pandemic struck, children have developed normally, she adds. One potentially greater area of concern may be the impact of masks on children's language development. Here, experts too are somewhat divided in their views, but they agree on one thing: there's a lot parents can do to bridge any budding problems.

*What do you think about this text?*

- Child-tracking apps are growing. Although they help parents keep tabs, are they hurting families in exchange for peace of mind? Elaine Spector was anxious to hear whether her son had safely gotten back to his dorm in Texas, after a recent visit home. But rather than waiting for him to call or text, the Baltimore, US-based mum was carrying on with her day, and awaiting a reassuring ding from her phone. The app keeps constant tabs on the whereabouts of her three children, letting her know when they're on the move, when they're safely home, if they're somewhere they shouldn't be and a whole host of other data.

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- The family have used the app for several years now, and Spector says while her younger children tend to turn off their locations at times, her oldest son has always been relaxed about using it. But even though he is now 18 and living across the country, she admits the idea of him removing the app and taking away those reassuring dings "makes me feel stressed". "I don't want to be the helicopter parent, but we've had this for a while, and there's a part of me that's hesitant to totally cut it off," she says. "I like this subtle part of, 'he's safe and I don't need to pester him'."

*What do you think about this text?*

- Family-tracking apps have exploded in popularity over the past decade or so. A parent's natural instinct to protect their children is a component of growth, of course – but these apps keep booming as many parents feel the world – both off and online – is inherently and increasingly dangerous. Yet experts say parents wanting to use them should think very hard about how they'll do so, and how they'll talk to their children about them. Apps are becoming ever more sophisticated in the data they're gathering, raising questions about personal security. And children raised being app-

monitored are now reaching adulthood, leaving the parents with the quandary – when do you turn them off?

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- Sonia Livingstone, a professor in the department of media and communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science, believes there is in fact “zero evidence that any of these apps keep children safer”. “I’ve never seen any and I look at all the evidence,” she says. As an expert in children’s digital rights and safety, who has written several books about parenting in the digital age, Livingstone feels the extensive adoption of tracking apps is an understandable response to constant headlines about the “terrible dangers to our children”. But she argues that in the longer term, tracking apps can have “unintended but also damaging consequences”, not least to the parent-child relationship.

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- App makers and advertisers may be keen to make parents believe getting an app is an act of parental love, she says, but “the most important thing for development is that the child learns to trust the parent and the parents the child”. Relying on an app to find out where a child is or what they are looking at online, particularly without their knowledge, can seriously undermine that trust, she says, which might lead children to make riskier choices or get clever about evading detection. As well as the right to be safe, children do also have a right to privacy, particularly as they get older, says Livingstone.

*What do you think about this text?*

- Despite adages and advice that tell people from a young age hard work will get you everywhere, it really won’t, says Jeff Shannon, an executive coach, and author of *Hard Work is Not Enough: The Surprising Truth about Being Believable at Work*. He believes “hard work is a good start”, and early in your career, it can certainly help you establish yourself in a job. But it’s not enough to take you all the way to the top. “At a certain point you look around and realise, wow, everyone works hard at this level. Expertise and hard work just become the expectation, and will not help you up the ladder.” Hard work, says Shannon, doesn’t much matter if no one recognises you’re doing it. To translate that effort into promotions and advancement, especially in a changed world of work, you have to make people notice it – and you.

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- This flies in the face of societal training that begins as early as primary school, when students are taught that the quiet, hard workers are those most likely to prosper. Because teachers reward such qualities in early years, we tend to expect our eventual bosses will, too. It’s frustrating, then, to enter the working world only to discover this engrained lesson is often incorrect. In fact, as Shannon notes, hard work alone typically goes unnoticed after a certain point, because everyone around you is working at or about the same level. If you don’t draw attention to yourself in other ways, it’s easy to fade into the background.

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- Yet in most offices and industries, proven ability alone isn't enough to help you get ahead, because you also need to be likeable and memorable. "If you want to have impact and influence, people need to trust and believe in you," says Shannon, the same way they do a candidate they support. Basically, to climb the ladder, it's necessary to be not just a great worker, but a bit of a politician. "You need to be seen as a leader," says Frohlinger. "You need to be liked: by people at your level, by people above you and by people below you. When you evaluate work, the research is quite clear – people who are liked get better ratings, even if their work is the same."

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- However, it is very possible to increase your political capital at work. There are basic tactics that can make you a well-liked member of the office, simply by paying attention to your colleagues. "You need to think about how to connect with people other than just on the work," says Frohlinger. "Do we have a shared hobby or interest? Let's say I know you like gardening, and I see this gardening article and I send it to you. That's pretty simple, but you're going to like me more." While it may seem a bit manipulative, that kind of glad-handing doesn't actually hurt anyone, and it's what may be necessary to get ahead.

*What do you think about this text?*

- For years, she says, she feels like she's been overlooked for promotions and pay rises at work on account of her gender, particularly after becoming a mother in 2018. Since then, she's picked up the brunt of childcare responsibilities because her husband, who is a banker, has tended to travel more frequently for work. That, she adds, has given her a misguided reputation among her colleagues and managers – the majority of whom are male – for not being professionally driven. Then when Covid-19 hit, it was as if all the factors already holding her back were supercharged. When her daughter's day care closed in March 2020, Jia became the default caregiver while trying to stay afloat at work.

*What do you think about this text?*

- In early 2021, Jia's therapist told her she was suffering from burnout. Jia says she'd never struggled with her mental health before. "But now I'm just trying to get through each week while staying sane," she says. Jia's story is symptomatic of a deeply ingrained imbalance in society that the pandemic has both highlighted and exacerbated. For multiple reasons, women, particularly mothers, are still more likely than men to manage a more complex set of responsibilities on a daily basis – an often-unpredictable combination of unpaid domestic chores and paid professional work. Though the mental strain of mastering this balancing act has been apparent for decades, Covid-19 has cast a particularly harsh light on the problem.

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- Statistics show that stress and burnout are affecting more women than men, and particularly more working mothers than working fathers. This could have multiple impacts for the post-pandemic world of work, making it important that both companies and wider society find ways to reduce this

imbalance. Experts generally agree that there's no single reason women burn out, but they widely acknowledge that the way societal structures and gender norms intersect plays a significant role. Workplace inequalities, for example, are inextricably linked to traditional gender roles.

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- Several studies have also shown more specifically that incidences of burnout among women are greater because of differences in job conditions and the impact of gender on progression. In 2018, researchers from University of Montreal published a study tracking 2,026 workers over the course of four years. The academics concluded that women were more vulnerable to burnout than men because women were less likely to be promoted than men, and therefore more likely to be in positions with less authority which can lead to increased stress and frustration. The researchers also found that women were more likely to head single-parent families, experience child-related strains, invest time in domestic tasks and have lower self-esteem – all things that can exacerbate burnout.

*What do you think about this text?*

- Structures supporting parents' and carers' lives closed down, and in most cases, this excess burden fell on women. One study, conducted by academics from Harvard University, Harvard Business School and London Business School, evaluated survey responses from 30,000 individuals around the world and found that women – especially mothers – had spent significantly more time on childcare and chores during Covid-19 than they did pre-pandemic, and that this was directly linked to lower wellbeing. Many women had already set themselves up as the default caregiver within their households, and the pandemic obliterated the support systems that had previously allowed them to balance paid employment and domestic work.

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