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Work Fierce, Part 2: Home Base

Phoenix-based creative professional discusses the challenges and benefits of being a digital nomad

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By **Liz Massey**, September 2015 Issue.

Decker Moss didn't intend to join a workplace revolution six-and-a-half years ago. He just wanted to hang on to a job he loved.

Moss moved from Phoenix to Columbus, Ohio, in 2007 to take a job as an associate creative director with the digital marketing agency Resource/Ammirati. He worked in Ohio for almost two years. At that point, he had met his partner, Ethan Sullivan, and both of them worked for the agency. Both men had Phoenix roots, and wanted to return to the Southwest.

"We asked our company if we could move and still keep our jobs," he explained. The company agreed, and they did.

Moss is among a growing number of Americans who work outside of a traditional office setting. According to a recent American Time Use Survey released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 23 percent of respondents reported completing some or all of their work from home. While his specific story as a trans man who came out and began his gender transition process while working from home is unique, his narrative illustrates more generally the advantages and

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pitfalls that this particular work style provides for many Americans, including members of the LGBT community.

Second Time Around

Moss's current telecommuting arrangement is not the first time he's worked remotely. In 2000, he and his twin sister, Jenny, lived near each other in North Phoenix and worked remotely for a company in Tempe. While the situation was good for saving time and money on their commute, the technology to electronically review and approve complex graphics-heavy documents was lacking at the dawn of the 21st century.



"We started with a dial-up modem, and our boss got us a high-speed modem," he said. "We were just happy to have email."

But the faster modem couldn't bridge other communications gaps, so Moss found himself spending more and more time at the company headquarters, eventually working in the office full time.

Today, he is able to stay in touch with his colleagues in Columbus with the help of project management apps such as Trello, and the messaging app Microsoft Lync, which Moss said allowed him to contact coworkers during

client calls and have access to information that he would otherwise need to be inside the conference rooms of his company to obtain.

Although Resource/Ammirati had employed a number of employees who worked remotely, Moss said he was among the first creative employees to work from home. Moss and the company discovered that having him fly in for brainstorming sessions and client meetings resolved one of the biggest challenges in remote work – collaborating effectively with others in an industry that has traditionally relied on in-person meetings to "seal the deal." And the solitude that Moss gets by working at home is a real advantage when he needs to do work requiring concentration.

"Because I'm so far away, I have chunks of time to focus," he said. "When I need to do strategy work or copywriting, that's huge."

Changing Gender From Far Away

Working outside of a traditional office environment had its own advantages and pitfalls when Moss transitioned his gender identity from female to male three years ago. He said that being able to work by himself, out of the public eye, during the phases of his transformation during which his appearance changed the most helped reduce his stress levels. But he did not attempt to come out as trans to his employers from a distance.

"I planned an in-person trip to talk to our HR director, to explain the impact of my transition and to ask for help navigating the process as it related to my job," he said. On that same trip, Moss, the HR director, and the company founder crafted a plan for announcing the news to Moss's co-workers and clients. Moss made a return trip a few weeks later when the announcement was made; his company used the opportunity to clarify its support of transgender employees and to provide education on the topic for staff.

Moss said he'd experienced a high level of acceptance from coworkers and clients alike, something he said he knew was not typically the case for trans workers in his situation. One downside to working remotely during his transition, he said, was that his coworkers got fewer opportunities to practice the proper pronouns for Moss and using his chosen male name; he

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said he dealt with this challenge by asking a select group of work friends from the Columbus office to guide others into using the proper terms and letting Moss know how that effort was going.

The World Is The Recruiting Pool

Moss acknowledged that his employer was a leader in hiring telecommuting employees; he estimated that nearly 100 of Resource/Ammirati's 400 staff members worked outside the company's four corporate offices. For those who want to work remotely, he advised pitching the concept to management and framing it in terms of how it improves the ability of the company to go after and sign top talent.



"When a company insists on people working from their offices, they are limiting their ability to reach the best people for the job," he said. "Some functions clearly have to be onsite, but if a company can see the benefit to them (from telecommuting) and see how they can retain good people, that can help improve your chances of getting a remote position," he asserted.

Fast Facts About Working Remotely

- Of the 140 million Americans who have jobs, as many as 30 million work from home at least one day per week.
- About half of all jobs are compatible with remote work, at least part time.
- The number of full-time telecommuters is expected to rise from 3 million in 2012 to 4.9 million by 2016.
- If all jobs that could be done remotely were done so at least part-time, the collective savings – to businesses, employees and costs to the environment – would total more than \$700 million.
- Remote workers are less fatigued both emotionally and physically, and report being happier and more satisfied with their work.

Source: Benefits of Employee Telecommuting Infographic
(boltinsurance.com/news/miscellaneous/benefits-of-employee-telecommuting-infographic).



How To Find A Remote Work Position

Work options advisor and negotiation coach Pat Katepoo of Work Options has the following advice for those seeking a remote work situation.

1. During a job search, scout out clues about the company's culture related to flexible work arrangements, including

telecommuting.

2. Your best bet for garnering a remote work arrangement is to negotiate it in your current work position, especially if you've worked for the same boss for at least two

years and have a reliable work record.

3. Build your case for a remote work arrangement by doing your homework and framing your proposal in terms of how it benefits your employer.

4. Develop a written proposal that details how you will operate as an employee once you are working remotely.

Source: workoptions.com.

Liz Massey has been involved in LGBT community-building activities in Kansas City and the Valley of the Sun, and is a former managing editor of *Echo Magazine*.

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