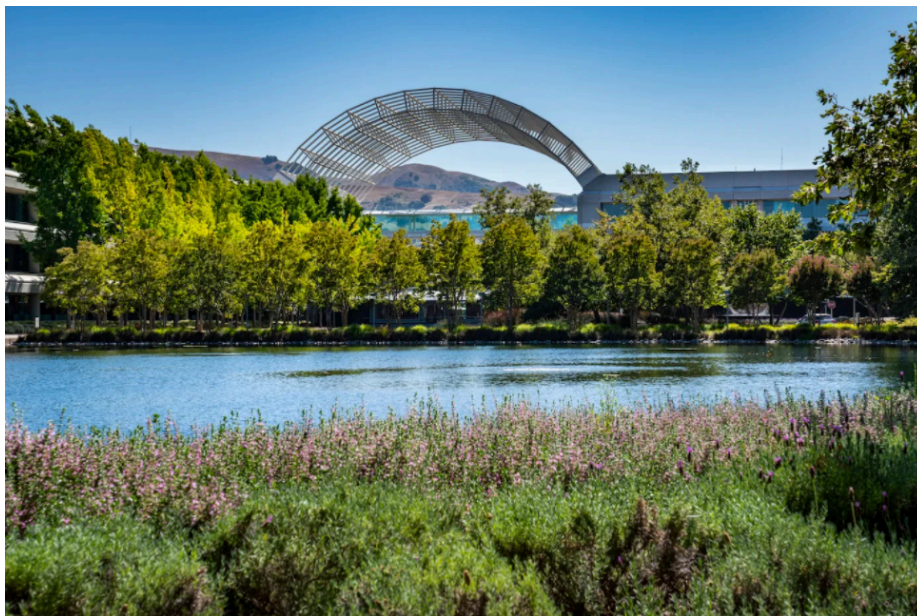


Office Life Disrupted: A Suburban Developer Contemplates the Future

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By **Alex Mehran, Jr.**

The fate of the office is more than academic for us. As the third-generation owners of Bishop Ranch, a ten million square foot suburban Bay Area development with substantial office space, our family has had a lot to think about over the last year. We have learned that flexibility to work from home can benefit both the individual and the organization. We have also seen the unraveling of the connective tissue the office provides for our teams, along with an increasing appreciation for the balance it brings to our home life.

The office is where we come together. Thinking back to the first months of my career working long hours at a New York investment bank, I recall how much I grew from the direct on the job training and the opportunity to observe others in action. I noted who among my fellow analysts was most revered by the leaders, and I emulated their behavior. I also learned which behaviors were neither productive nor rewarded. Valuable time with senior leaders who were open to mentoring me came about not in formally scheduled sessions but rather through casual interaction in the office. That basic training was essential to learning how to succeed, and would have been impossible without an office. After that experience, I understood why our family has made a generational investment in creating a uniquely supportive environment for these types of in person experiences.

For us, simplified prognostications of what the office will become are just that, overly simplified. There are many kinds of workers and many cases to be made for the office. Each individual will be uniquely affected. How a company optimizes its workplace will be a product of how it deploys its unique toolkit to do what it has always aimed to do: attract, retain and grow talent at all levels. Everything from entry level jobs to top executive positions will now come with flexibility perks, but figuring out how to assemble under one roof at the right times and in the right ways will be critical. The physical office remains the crucial place where we set the tone as leaders, where we rub shoulders with all levels of our team, and where our teams can remain in sync with daily changes in strategy.

Over the last year, many decision makers with great home office setups, second homes and other luxuries have been liberated by remote work and have arguably gained the most balance. Most people simply do not have the luxury of dedicated zoom rooms at home or at-home childcare. That in mind, it is crucial for us as leaders to realize that the office is most important not for those at the top, but for the rest of the essential team. As the core of the workforce, they carry and reaffirm the company culture, and need the office with its coffee corner and other opportunities for human interaction. They seek, too, the benefits of having on-site leaders who provide them a sense of stability and continuity.

At Bishop Ranch, I have spoken with business leaders from a variety of industries about their return-to-work plans and their pandemic experiences. They have shared concerns about the pandemic's impact on their teams and are confident that returning to the office will re-energize everyone. For many companies, productivity may not have suffered considerably during the pandemic, but many workers – most notably Millennials – have missed the dynamics of coming into the office. Team dynamics, and team culture, have gained importance through this challenging pandemic. Companies that entered it strong adeptly rode the wave, but over time that wave will surely crash without the personal connection of the office environment.

Cloud contact center software leader Five9, for example, recently built a new headquarters office in Bishop Ranch, specifically to accommodate the growing variety of workstyles it promotes. The company was drawn to the informal breakout spaces, wellness areas, natural light and other amenities that create opportunities for connection. Their leadership team viewed maintaining a physical office as important for inspiring collaboration, supporting the culture of a growing business, and meeting employee demand to work from an office. Five9 shared with us that Bishop Ranch offices provide the flexibility to navigate their changing world with a combination of assigned and flexible spaces – supporting their shift to a hybrid model that honors the evolving ways their teams prefer to work.

For us at Bishop Ranch, we hope that companies capitalize on creating workplaces that are closer to housing and that offer an array of ever more adaptable and flexible formats. Companies and their employees increasingly value being afforded more choice when it comes to the office environment, and being able to work close to home contributes to productivity and employee satisfaction. We think that desks and offices should become hotel-like, and amenity space should take up a larger share of the office. Having a branded corporate environment with the right technology is more important than having a personal desk or office. It allows employees to flex across multiple locations without the wasted space that comes with multiple dedicated desks. This shift would provide a designated place to go without the burden of a daily commute and offer the flexibility to move between a network of offices where there

is always a desk, an office or a conference room available. Teams will naturally gravitate to one location, or will commit to spending a portion of the week together at a certain location to gain connectivity. Large companies can perhaps accomplish this with greater ease. Smaller organizations may need more work-from-home flexibility, taking advantage of the amazing co-working options that have become available, to provide closer to home options. Of course, this is all assuming a post-virus world, which I hope will be a reality soon.

What it means to “go to work” will be very different tomorrow from what it was yesterday, but changes in office environments have been a constant. In just forty years we have re-tenanted Bishop Ranch five times over with new styles and formats. The forces of the pandemic are propelling us ever more rapidly into a new and exciting world that hopefully adds to economic productivity and to our great nation’s competitiveness and success on the world stage. Our hope is that companies think deeply about this and adapt to make their teams happy, while working always to maintain the culture that has been as important to past success as it will be moving forward.

As for us, we are adding substantial housing on site, continuing to add best-in-class stores, restaurants and services to our City Center downtown development, and optimizing our office buildings for the future. We engage in these efforts to ensure that Bishop Ranch is always associated with the highest quality and maintains its place as a sought-after Bay Area hub.

Our goal is to create a place where team members can work, work out, eat, walk, conference, and collaborate, living a personal life that blends with the distinctive culture their company offers them as a tenant of Bishop Ranch.

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