

#WorkAnywhere, the global advocacy movement representing remote and hybrid workers

Maddy Ness spoke to Ben Marks, Founder and CEO of The #WorkAnywhere Campaign about seeing the pandemic as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rewrite the rules and redefine our culture's relationship with work.

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Tell us a bit about your background, and what impact did this have on launching the #WorkAnywhere Campaign?

By the time I turned twenty seven, my mental health was in pieces. I was so unwell that even going outside for fresh air was incredibly difficult. Travelling felt impossible, which could've spelt the end of my career had it not been early 2020. The UK was in lockdown and I was working from home.

Honestly, it feels strange to acknowledge having benefited from a terrible global event, but in truth, the pandemic normalised remote working. And for me and for millions of others, this was a blessing.

Since then, my health has improved, but not everyone is that lucky. According to the World Health Organisation, today, 1.3 billion people live with a mental or physical impairment. My experience helped me see that

flexible working is not a 'perk' or a 'nice-to-have'. It's an economic lifeline for a vast number of people who, without these arrangements, cannot access work.

What was the catalyst for launching #WorkAnywhere?

Beyond my personal experiences, it was clear that the pandemic shattered the cultural and technological barriers that had prevented remote work for many people in the past. We saw a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rewrite the rules and redefine our culture's relationship with work.

Equally, this upheaval is exacerbating pre-existing pressures on workers' well-being. The speed and scale of the shift was always going to present challenges, and we want to tackle those problems head-on. The fundamental issue is to do with our relationship with technology. Are we going to let it continue driving burnout and social isolation, or will we mindfully harness it to create a more inclusive society?

Tell me about #WorkAnywhere?

The #WorkAnywhere Campaign is the global advocacy movement representing remote and hybrid workers. We collaborate with policymakers, business leaders, academics, innovators and, of course, remote workers. Through our campaigns, research and innovation, we aim to contribute to a healthier future of work, where no one is left behind.

How has #WorkAnywhere evolved since its

launch? When was this?

We launched the campaign in 2021 and much of our work has been bringing experts and policymakers together and participating in research on key topics. For example, we conducted the first-ever study on workplace loneliness that incorporated data from non-home remote work environments - and the results were fascinating! The data revealed that coworking spaces are actually more socially fulfilling than offices for many people, something that contradicts the popular narrative that remote work equates to lonely, lockdown-imposed homeworking. As it happens, it all depends on the kind of working arrangements we choose to promote. Now, our focus is to support the development of policy solutions that improve the remote work experience for all.

How are you funded?

We're fortunate to fund the campaign through a combination of grants and donations, as well as media partnerships with brands that want to reach our 1.3 million social media followers.

What has been your biggest challenge so far, and how have you overcome this?

We're pushing back against the political and economic forces that would have us revert to the antiquated and exclusionary 9-to-5 office model. This is not easy as we're talking about some of the most powerful people on the planet, as well as deeply entrenched corporate attitudes. Some politicians and billionaires claim the remote work movement is driven by laziness and entitlement. But, in reality, nothing is more effective at bringing marginalised groups like disabled people and refugees into the workforce than remote work. That's what is really at stake here. So our mission is to correct the narrative, and we're doing that one (sometimes

challenging) conversation at a time.

What's in the pipeline for #WorkAnywhere?

We're continuing to collaborate with policymakers in the EU and various national governments on a range of campaigns and solutions. We have a number of research projects in the works, and the results of our 'Global Life-Work Survey' (ran in partnership with IE Business School and Remote) will be published shortly.

What's the ultimate goal for #WorkAnywhere?

Our mission statement is simple: we believe the freedom to choose where and how we work best should be available to everyone, everywhere. This requires tangible policy wins, international cooperation, and a shift in attitudes.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders of advocacy movements?

Prioritise your well-being. This can be supported by establishing life-work boundaries and nurturing the non work-related dimensions of life. There's this insidious idea in our achievement-obsessed culture that if we're passionate about a project or cause, then it should consume our entire existence. But we are so much more than our jobs and our accomplishments, no matter how impactful. If our identities and sense of self-worth become too entangled with what we do, or the boundaries between our job and life disappears, then burnout is virtually guaranteed. Which will ultimately make us less effective and productive, anyway.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

A: Probably the most important rule that I aim to live by is to stay present throughout the inevitable ups and downs. Building any ambitious project is a rollercoaster but I try not to be so attached to the outcomes. Whether something "good" or "bad" is happening, it's all an opportunity for me to notice the thoughts, feelings and sensations appearing in that moment, and then reflect on who or what is the "I" that is doing the noticing. For anyone interested in this approach, I highly recommend two books: "The Surrender Experiment" by Michael Singer and "Being Aware of Being Aware" by Rupert Spira.

Ben Marks is the Founder and CEO of *The #WorkAnywhere Campaign*.

Article by Ben Marks