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# Multitasking is the 'New Normal': Implications of longer travel time on a working professional

COVID-19 was a blessing in disguise for such professionals. They could take on multiple assignments, work as many hours as physically possible, often simultaneously on multiple monitors.

Written by **FE Lifestyle**  
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Resuming office is something employees now dread.

By **Dr Malini Saba**

Since the term "moonlighting" has always been officially frowned upon by organisations, in most instances management tends to look the other way when some of the professionals on their team take up additional work over and beyond their assigned tasks, as long as deadlines are met.

The attitude can be summed up in three words: ignorance is bliss, especially when the company's designer has also prepared free invitation cards for your daughter's engagement, marriage, and baby shower, as well as logos for your wife's business over the years.

COVID-19 was a blessing in disguise for such professionals. They could take on multiple assignments, and work as many hours as physically possible, often simultaneously on multiple monitors. Their reporting bosses had an "out of sight, out of mind" attitude, provided work files were emailed in time.

Resuming office is something they now dread, and with good reason. The travel time from their residence to the workplace can be 3–4 hours, if not more. During the lockdown phase, this translated into almost 25–30% incremental work and, therefore, earnings. That would stop immediately.

Private clients, patiently developed over almost two years of rushed overnight assignments, will move on to another service provider in an instant. After all, there is a deluge of trained freelancers offering their finely honed skills at ridiculously low rates due to the post-pandemic layoffs.

The flip side is that the official workload has almost quadrupled due to fewer staff on the payroll. Organizations are also reluctant to sanction additional funds for outsourcing as department budgets have been drastically reduced. So one has to effectively work more with less income.

That was the icing on the cake. Now here's the cherry on top. The habit of travelling to work by local transportation has been lost. The cost of shared cab rides and surge pricing during peak hours make it prohibitively expensive to even attend office every other day.

From a scenario where 'entrepreneurial multitasking' was acceptable as long as it didn't interfere with their responsibilities, it has now become part of the official job description in the "New Normal." No wonder a substantial number of employees are preferring to quit rather than return to the workplace.

Being forced to toe the line isn't as rewarding as it used to be. While opportunities to augment your income on the side do exist, the time required to take them up and deliver within the timeframe in accordance with the client's requirements simply isn't available anymore.

**(Dr Malini Saba is a human rights activist, global advocate for women, author, and founder and chairman of the Anannke Foundation)**

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