

GREAT *Pajama* JOBS

Your Complete Guide to Working from Home



KERRY HANNON

WILEY

Great Pajama Jobs

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Your Complete Guide to Working from Home

By Kerry Hannon

**Best-selling Author, *The New York Times* Columnist,
Career Expert**

WILEY

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For Zena and Caparino Z

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About the Author



Photo credit: Elizabeth Dranitzke

Kerry Hannon is a leading authority and strategist on career transitions, entrepreneurship, personal finance, and retirement. She is a frequent TV and radio commentator and is a sought-after keynote speaker at conferences.

Kerry is the best-selling and award-winning author of 14 books, including *Never Too Old to Get Rich: The Entrepreneur's Guide to Starting a Business Mid-Life*, published by John Wiley & Sons in 2019, a number one bestseller on Amazon and selected by the *Washington Post* for its Book-of-the-Month Club.

Other best-selling and award-winning books penned by Kerry include *Money Confidence: Really Smart Financial Moves for Newly Single Women*, *Great Jobs for Everyone 50+: Finding Work That Keeps You*

About the Author

Happy and Healthy . . . and Pays the Bills, Love Your Job: The New Rules for Career Happiness, Getting the Job You Want after 50, and What's Next?: Finding Your Passion and Your Dream Job in Your Forties, Fifties, and Beyond.

Kerry is currently an expert columnist and regular contributor to *The New York Times*, *MarketWatch*, and *Forbes*, and is the PBS website NextAvenue.org personal finance and entrepreneur expert. Her areas of expertise include entrepreneurship, personal finance, retirement, wealth management, and career transition. Her advice as a work and jobs expert is a regular feature in AARP publications.

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Also by Kerry Hannon

Never Too Old to Get Rich: The Entrepreneur's Guide to Starting a Business at Mid-Life

Great Jobs for Everyone 50+, Updated edition: *Finding Work That Keeps You Happy and Healthy . . . and Pays the Bills*

Money Confidence: Really Smart Financial Moves for Newly Single Women

Getting the Job You Want After 50 for Dummies

Love Your Job: The New Rules for Career Happiness

Great Jobs for Everyone 50+: Finding Work That Keeps You Happy and Healthy . . . and Pays the Bills

What's Next: Follow Your Passion and Find Your Dream Job

Suddenly Single: Money Skills for Divorcees and Widows

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I love my job. I log in to my computer in the quiet predawn from my comfy couch with a steaming mug of black coffee and get to work tout de suite.

This spring, in what felt like a blink of an eye, remote work suddenly was thrust onto many workers and employers who had never wished for this to be the only work option. And there were millions of workers like me, logging into the office without the commute, not because they wanted to, but because they had no choice.

The coronavirus has radically changed our workplaces. Unprecedented, unprepared, and uncharted, working from home became the norm. Adjust and get on with it. Kids scrambling underfoot, teenagers sitting at the table beside us engaged in their online classrooms, ramping up tech skills to make virtual connections, feeling isolated. Oh boy, all of the above became a stark and somewhat frightening reality for many workers.

Everyone in the world has been impacted by this pandemic. And our workplaces may be changed forever. As I finish this manuscript, there is no way to predict our future. But this I do foresee: An increasing number of employers will become remote-friendly and probably institute a formal remote work policy. During the mandated time with offices shuttered, they'll have recognized the benefits of having remote workers.

"An ongoing, formal shift in the way people can work will happen in stages as it becomes increasingly clear a return to 'normal' won't happen overnight," says Cali Williams Yost, chief strategist and futurist at Flex+Strategy Group. "After a year to a year and a half of remote and flexible working, it will be part of the 'way we work here' cultural DNA, and there will be no going back," she says. "Then the

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flexible work genie will be officially out of the bottle, and all employees will benefit beyond the crisis.”

Not surprisingly, in a Gallup national poll conducted in April, three in five U.S. workers who had been doing their jobs from home during the coronavirus pandemic said they would prefer to continue to work remotely as much as possible, once public health restrictions are lifted.

And a study from economics professors Jonathan Dingel and Brent Neiman of the University of Chicago estimates that while less than a quarter of all full-time employees worked from home at least sometimes before the pandemic, *37 percent of jobs could be done entirely from home.*

That said, industries where telework is a practical option at the moment tend to employ better-educated workers—fields like professional, scientific, and technical services, as well as finance and management, according to the report. Among the ones least flexible for telework: retail trade and food service, which typically employ sizable numbers of low-wage older workers.

“I don’t think there will ever be a company again that doesn’t consider that some element of emergency preparedness has to be made and working remotely in some form needs to be addressed and hopefully turned into a formalized policy,” Sara Sutton, founder and CEO of the job boards FlexJobs and Remote.co, tells me.

“It is the tipping point for work from home as a valid and important component of a healthy organization and not just good for the worker. Having a remote component is never going to be doubted again, or looked at as fringe.”

Meanwhile, the enforced work-from-home scenario, for those of you who have never considered it, may have triggered a desire to keep it going after the pandemic resolves itself.

I have never before talked to so many workers who adapted to using communication technology like Zoom conferencing and are embracing it, no longer intimidated or frustrated by screen-to-screen meetings and virtual meet-ups to chat with co-workers. They feel empowered.

My goal in writing this book is to help workers find a great remote job. Many of you may now have one—whether you opted in or not. If that’s the case, skip to my workshop in Part III for advice on how to succeed as a remote worker over the long haul.

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Each of us has unique work requirements and personalities, so use my advice as motivation. You will ultimately develop your own remote work recipe that suits you and, importantly, your manager and your employer's needs.

I work for several employers, but it's all virtual, and I have for a long, long time. How it works for me will differ from what works for you, but there is a spine of wisdom that you will find here that you can mold to make your own secret sauce.

The Changing Face of Remote Work

Even before the COVID-19, working from home was steadily gaining a head of steam for workers of all ages. Over the last five years, U.S. workers working remotely grew 44 percent to around 4.7 million, according to research by job board Flexjobs.com in partnership with Global Workplace Analytics.

Gallup research conducted before the onset of COVID-19 showed that 43 percent of employees worked remotely in some capacity. In a study conducted by Condeco Software, 41 percent of global businesses surveyed said they already offered some degree of remote working. Upwork's "Future Workforce Report" predicted that 73 percent of all teams will have remote workers by 2028, a percentage that may even be on the conservative side in the aftermath of the 2020 stay-at-home mandates.

Fueling the trend pre-COVID-19: In a survey from global outplacement and executive and business coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc., 70 percent of employers reported they were having trouble finding applicants with the necessary qualifications. To attract talent, 62 percent were offering remote work options.

"Employers are having trouble finding workers with the skills needed to perform their duties," says Andrew Challenger, vice president of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. "If this continues, it could hurt the bottom line and limit expansion. As employees, especially Millennials and Gen Z workers, demand more work/life balance, employers will find they must respond with these offerings."

Who doesn't yearn for flexible work schedules, a shuffle to the next room as a commute, and the fundamental joy of working away in the most basic of business-casual clothing—our pajamas.

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In all seriousness, though, autonomy is one of the key components of loving a job, as I found when I wrote my book, *Love Your Job: The New Rules of Career Happiness*. Working remotely is an important way you can capture the elusive psychological feeling of freedom and personal independence. And there's a bottom-line benefit as well—it saves money that you might spend on commuting costs for transportation, meals and coffee out, work clothes, and the list goes on.

“More and more people are working remotely because they want flexibility over their schedule and where, when, and how they work,” Dan Schawbel (danschawbel.com), author of *Back to Human* and a Millennial and Gen X career and workplace expert, told me, again before the workplace shifted this spring. “And corporations benefit from a recruiting and retention standpoint by offering it, plus they save money on real estate costs. Both employees and employers win.”

This year, spurred by the coronavirus pandemic, “has been the ‘grand remote work experiment’ where people who have never worked remotely are for the first time and are benefitting from it,” Schawbel told me. “During this time, companies were being forced to allow their employees to work remotely for health and safety reasons, so they are developing the policies they should have had years ago.”

Technology has enabled people to work from Bali to Boston, regardless of where their boss is situated, and this year's cataclysmic necessity has borne that out. Importantly, they can hold on to a job when a partner or spouse is transferred to another posting, which is particularly germane to military spouses. (More on employers offering remote positions aimed at military spouses in Chapter 8.)

Video conferencing, texting, and other collaborative tools have blown open the door to the workplace. “In the future, remote work options will be as common as healthcare coverage,” Schawbel says. “It will be sought after and almost a benefit requirement. Employers that don't offer flexibility will not be able to compete for the top talent. Many younger workers and friends I know are willing to work for less money if they can work remotely. They're asking about it in their interviews.”

Back in 2007, when Schawbel created one of the first social media positions at a Fortune 200 company, he asked his manager if he could work from home at least occasionally. “I justified not being in the office because I could conduct all of my social media respon-

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sibilities remotely,” Schawbel recalls. “I had created and managed the company’s Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter accounts while contributing to their internal social media platform and helping various departments run campaigns. My manager wouldn’t give me permission to work from home because, as he said, ‘it would make your teammates jealous.’ If my manager had responded by granting me the privilege to work from home, my employment situation might have sufficed and I would have stayed with the company longer.”

For those of you at mid-life, after years of commuting to an office, a work-from-home position can, in fact, be a dream job, and you may have just discovered that joy. It is for me. The top four reported reasons people seek remote work, according to an analysis by FlexJobs.com, are work-life balance (75 percent), family (45 percent), time savings (42 percent), and commute stress (41 percent). Other high-ranking factors for seeking flexible work options include avoiding office politics and distractions (33 percent), travel (29 percent), cost savings (25 percent), being a pet owner (24 percent), having caregiving responsibilities (18 percent), and living in a bad local job market (15 percent).

“Older workers want to retire from the office, not the job,” says Sharon Emek, founder of Work at Home Vintage Experts (WAHVE.com), a site for professionals over 50 who work from home for over 300 insurance and accounting firms. “Meantime, employers are looking for people they do not need to train.”

Getting Started

One of the easiest ways to stay in the workforce as you age, or as life events shift for you (a marriage, a spouse transfer, caring for children or aging relatives, a health issue) is to have a great pajama job, as I like to refer to working remotely. This has been my mode of work for many years now, albeit not always clad in pjs. And I admit, I’m far from retired at 59, but I find the autonomy of working outside of an office environment suits my lifestyle.

Landing a job that’s a great fit for both parties is rarely an easy endeavor, and that’s especially true for one where an employee is working out of a manager’s sight on a regular basis. There’s a bond of trust and commitment that is integral to make these work relationships thrive.

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You aren't reinventing yourself in order to work from home, you are redeploying. You already have many of the skills in your wheelhouse right now that will help make it work for you. These include organizational skills, an ability to focus, self-discipline, communication skills (both verbal and written), time-management skills, and a self-reliant ability to work independently.

Tech skills are especially important when you work remotely, and that might mean learning new computer programs and communication tools, such as web conferencing, video chats, and other tools, and making sure typing skills are up to par. The ability to troubleshoot minor computer and technical issues can also come in handy.

And it goes without saying that you have to be comfortable working without a pal to pop around the corner to kibitz with to break up the day. Importantly, you have to really want to continue to work—not to just dabble in it.

The hundreds of remote workers I have interviewed have told me what I already know firsthand, that it takes discipline, but the time flexibility to do things such as nonwork hobbies, volunteering, or simply the joy of working with their dog nestled under their desk (as I often do with my Labrador retriever, Zena) is what makes it worthwhile.

Another, lesser-known aspect to chuck into the pro column: When you work remotely, your “age” is not necessarily the deal breaker it can be when you're front and center in the workplace, face to face. Truth. And that holds true for those in their 20s as well as those in their 60s and over.

In this book you will find my strategic advice on how to land a remote job, to love it and make it work for you. This includes:

- *Do the inner soul-searching.* Not everyone is hard-wired to be a remote worker. “You need to be honest with yourself,” Sutton tells me. “Are you self-disciplined, focused, organized, skilled at time-management? You must be able to set boundaries around your work environment with friends, family, neighbors, or when working in a co-working space and not being distracted all the time.”

Are you tech-savvy, open to learning new tools, and comfortable fixing minor technical problems? They will arise.

Do you thrive off of the stimulation of office colleagues buzzing around you? One of the biggest hurdles for remote workers is

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loneliness. “If it’s going to be a real con for you, and you can feel it in your gut that it will be hard for you not to have that interaction and action environment, then don’t consider remote work,” Sutton advises. “Part-time or a flexible schedule might be better.”

I agree with Sutton. Succeeding as a remote worker really is an individual effort. If you’re in your 20s and 30s, an office environment can be fantastic. You build friendships and a lifelong network. I loved working with colleagues during my 20s and 30s in the *Forbes* magazine office in Greenwich Village and at the *U.S. News & World Report* headquarters on the edge of Georgetown in Washington, D.C.

Many of those relationships remain strong today. I could not have achieved what I have in my career if I had not had that in-office experience and learning opportunity from the veterans who mentored me and those with whom I shared bylines and reporting duties along the way. Those long days and eyeball-to-eyeball interactions formed the spine of my work ethic and solidly built my career trajectory.

But for someone who has young children, or is an introvert, remote duties might be the perfect ticket to achieving a balanced approach to productive work. And for those gliding, or phasing, into retirement, or working part-time in retirement, the freedom to work remotely is a benefit you can’t put a price tag on.

That said, you can put a cost savings on some of the basics. The researchers at FlexJobs estimate that the average person could save around \$4,000 a year by working from home. Dry cleaning and laundering (\$500–\$1,500) ranked as one of the largest costs of working from an office, as well as lunches and coffee (\$1,040). Commuting also factored in, with items like gas (\$686) or car maintenance (\$767) costing additional money over the year.

- *Connect, connect, connect.* The very best remote workers will reach out to co-workers and managers regularly. “A key skill companies who hire remote workers are looking for is communication,” Sutton says. “You need to be able to say, hey, I’m a little confused about this, or hey, can you help clarify this for me? You have to take responsibility and speak up. If you’re not visible, it’s hard for your manager to know something’s wrong.”

Network with people you know at remote-friendly employers where you’d like to work. UnitedHealth Group, Kelly Services,

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Amazon, Robert Half International, GitLab, and Dell are among the leading companies regularly hiring for remote jobs. Xerox, American Express, and about two dozen other Fortune 500 companies have made entire divisions remote. (See Part II for a deeper dive.)

You might go straight to a company you'd like to work for, maybe even your current employer, and see if it hires remote workers. A good place to start is the career section of the company's website.

- *Take the time to research.* Online job boards like Flexjobs.com, Remote.co, and WAHVE.com connect employers with workers who are focused on legitimate work-from-home jobs and prescreen each job and employer to be certain they aren't scams. Other popular remote job boards to check out are Rat Race Rebellion, Working Nomads, We Work Remotely, Skip The Drive, Jobspresso, Sidehustl and ZipRecruiter, and even UpWork regular gigs (more on these in Chapter 5).

FlexJobs, for one, reports that its remote job listings grew 52 percent in the past two years; the most common and top career fields offering remote work are sales, medical and health, education and training, customer service, and computer and information technology.

Job titles range from customer service representative to program manager to teacher, accounting (bookkeepers, CFOs, controllers, etc.), administrative assistants, virtual assistants, medical transcriptionists, remote nurses, pharmacists, radiologists, and data entry. Pay ranges from \$18/hour to \$40/hour or more, depending on the level of the job and the experience. (See Part I.)

"Search on the job boards for skills you have and passions outside of titles," Sutton says. "Be a little experimental with it. If you're in data analytics, but also love biking, type in those words and see what comes up. With remote work, it is really helpful if you're passionate about what you're doing, and it's not just punching a clock That will keep you motivated when you are working solo."

- *Focus on a few employers.* "These remote jobs are increasingly competitive," Sutton says. "I encourage job seekers to put out fewer applications, but for jobs they really feel strongly about. Instead of doing 100 applications, do 10 for the ones you

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really, really want. Thoroughly investigate the company. Write in the cover letter that you admire x, y, z things they are doing. You can find these newsy items on their website press page or company culture page. This is your first impression, and you want to show you care. And if you know someone who works at the firm, toss out their name there, too.”

- *Watch out for scams.* There are a variety and abundance of jobs that are all career categories from entry level to executive. “But for every legitimate work-from-home job, there are dozens of job scams. Google the company name and the word “scam” and see what comes up, Sutton advises. “That’s not proof, but you will see if there is chatter about the quality of the company.”

Some States Actively Promote Remote Work

Fed up with living in an expensive city or community? Eager to bring your stress level down? Interested in working hours you prefer and from your home? That may sound like a TV infomercial, but the fact is that working remotely in a low-cost area is becoming easier at a time when it’s also becoming more appealing.

New programs in Savannah, Georgia, Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Vermont have been rolling out to lure new residents who’d work from there remotely. Also, new and growing websites are helping people find jobs where they can work from home, wherever that may be, as I mentioned above.

“Advances in technology such as high-speed internet and Wi-Fi over the last ten to fifteen years definitely make it easier to work outside of the office,” says Sutton. “And more people are knowledge workers, meaning that they work with ideas and information, rather than with machinery. The knowledge economy naturally supports jobs that can be done from home.”

Offering workplace flexibility through remote work is one way that employers can retain and attract skilled workers, and also “keep the trains running” as we all navigate the rapid shift toward telecommuting during the pandemic and its aftermath. Plus, there’s the bottom-line payback: By letting more workers work from home, businesses and nonprofits can reduce the cost of office space and equipment and see productivity improvements.

The payback is often more than money. “A study we conducted in the IT division of a Fortune 500 company shows that a shift to

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more flexible work practices—those that give employees more control over when and where they work and convey support for employees’ personal lives—benefits workers without hurting business performance,” says Phyllis Moen, whom I interviewed for an article in the *AARP Bulletin*. Moen is a professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota and co-author of *Overload: How Good Jobs Went Bad and What We Can Do About It*. “Instead,” she explains, “employees we studied describe feeling less stressed, more energized, and more satisfied with their jobs. The company benefits, too, because employees are less likely to experience burnout and less likely to look for other jobs, quit, or retire early.”

“Companies who want to keep talent are accommodating them,” says Emek, of WAHVE (Work at Home Vintage Experts). “And often they can’t find talent within driving distance to their office.”

The explosion of remote jobs means that many workers have more options in choosing where they live, how they commute, and which profession to follow. “The most notable change we’ve seen over the past year is not so much the growth in the sheer volume of remote job listings, but the growth in the variety of remote job titles these companies are seeking to hire,” says Sutton. “Companies are expanding the range of professional positions they’re allowing to work from home.”

Some cities and states are also finding that the lure of remote work (plus new initiatives offering cash grants) entices people of all ages to move there. FlexJobs is partnering with economic development groups in Kentucky, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Kansas, and Florida to help residents get remote jobs.

Tulsa, rolled out its Tulsa Remote initiative to lure new residents by offering them \$10,000 grants for a year to work from there remotely, plus other benefits.

The enterprise provides co-working space for the year at 36 Degrees North, Tulsa’s basecamp for entrepreneurs, and offers monthly meetups and workshops to develop skills and strategies for working remotely effectively. Program participants also have the option of living in a new, fully furnished apartment for a discounted rent, plus free utilities for the first three months.

Backed by the Tulsa-based nonprofit George Kaiser Family Foundation, the goal is to bring in people who’ll stick around, get involved in the community, strengthen the local economy, and maybe ultimately launch businesses locally.