

## THE VIRTUAL LEAP

Our universe is becoming smaller with greater interconnectivity. **Wade Foster**, CEO, Zapier — a company that connects web services together — interacts with **Sahil Parikh** on going remote

**"A team is not** a group of people who work together. A team is a group of people who trust each other." - Simon Sinek

Workplaces are breaking stereotypes, simply by virtue of being virtual. The future of work is distributed. The 9-to-5 timeline was created in the industrial age when people had shifts. Today, knowledge workers, armed with the ubiquity of broadband and sophisticated online software and apps, can work from anywhere and at any time. Plus, forward-thinking companies want to hire the best from all over the world so location and/or 'relocation' no longer matters. In my own workplace, there is a team member based in Europe, who is currently exploring the vineyards while she takes care of my customer support.

Ironically, as we become more global, the world becomes a much smaller place, and successful companies are changing the rules of the game by functioning remotely. I touched base with one such company, Zapier. Led by co-founder and CEO, Wade Foster, Zapier is a 100 per cent remote company that connects web services together. For example, Zapier makes it easy for a marketer to connect their e-mail marketing software to their analytics app. Here's what he had to say on taking the virtual leap.

**When did you plan to go remote? Did it just happen?**

Zapier started as a nights-and-weekends project, so from the very get-go there was no office. We got used to working through chat and other online tools so when we started hiring people, it felt natural to hire people who we liked working with. Those people didn't live near us, so the remote set-up simply continued.

**Trust is a big factor when running a remote team. What were the challenges you faced while growing your team?**

One of the easiest ways to build trust is to make sure

documenting your work is part of everyone's job. When people are sharing their work, it's easier for managers to assess what's happening, for colleagues to collaborate and ultimately, for trust to be built throughout the team.

**Is there an impact on ROI by working remotely? How do you measure this?**

The biggest ROI of working remotely is the calibre of people you get to work with. Because you aren't constrained to hiring within a 30-mile radius, you wind up with a much more diverse, talented applicant pool to select from. The ROI of getting to work with smart people is hard to measure, but it's big!

**How does the Zapier team brainstorm new ideas?**

We tend to not have 'brainstorming sessions'. Rather, new ideas come from lots of places. They come from a customer making a recommendation; they come from the marketing team interviewing a teammate and even from us doing QA for the app. New ideas come from everywhere. Most of the new ideas don't get worked on, but they do get logged. And, over time, the best ideas make their way into the product.

**What does it mean today to really be a 'virtual workspace'? What's the first step towards getting there?**

Today, a solid internet connection is really all you need to set up a virtual workspace. With access to an internet connection you can set up team chat tools, project management tools, video conferencing, and the other helpful apps you need to collaborate with your other virtual teammates.

**What are the top trends in going remote these days?**

Remote work is a bit trendy, but it's also new. That newness means a lot of folks still have questions about the basics like what tools should I use or how do I manage people.

Facing page: The world is the new desk with greater connectivity and remote accessibility

**What does the virtual work culture feel like?**

If you've ever been a part of an Open Source Software (OSS) project then it feels a lot like a more organised version of that. If you have been a part of OSS before, then the closest cultural feel might be that of a well moderated online community forum like a sub-reddit.

**Does your team ever meet, perhaps at yearly retreats? Is it tough for people who have only interacted virtually to be around each other?**

Absolutely! We do full team retreats twice a year. And people who live near each other meet up occasionally for lunch or some other occasion. For us it's never felt awkward to interact in person. It's exciting to be near people you only interact with online.

**Any thoughts on how VR/AR technology is shaping up to change the future of work (collaboration, communication and more)?**

VR/AR is neat, but their applications for a modern workforce are still works in progress.

**How do you maintain the human touch without a physical workspace?**

The retreats go a long way towards building camaraderie. We also do random pair buddies where we all spend a half hour each week, paired with someone at Zapier, getting to know them a bit. Plus you interact with your teammates all day on chat so you get to know their personality and sense of humour that way as well.

**Can traditional businesses break the stereotype of zero bricks and mortar? What are the advantages for them of going remote?**

Certainly! If you're a business that needs no retail presence and operates solely online, then going remote is definitely an option. The biggest advantage is that you can start hiring remotely too, which will attract talented people from around the world.

**There is so much written on the future of tech these days. What are your top three picks for 2025? First, self-driving cars will be pervasive. Secondly, energy will come to the forefront of tech. And thirdly, education will undergo a massive shift due to automation for routine jobs.**

**What about your clients? Since most companies still prefer a real-world face-to-face interaction, how does Zapier factor this into the mix?**

We use Google, Facebook, Twitter, and more all day long and many of us have never even met someone that works there. Face to face is important for some things, but our comfort level for interacting with businesses online is higher than ever. ■



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Wade Foster

Sahil Parikh is a web entrepreneur, founder & Chief Trailblazer of Synage Software. He is the author of The SaaS Edge — How Companies Can Leverage SaaS For Competitive Advantage.