

FOUR REASONS (AMONG MANY) WHY EARLY-CAREER PROFESSIONALS SHOULD **GO TO THE OFFICE**

At this year's Ocean Sciences Meeting in Glasgow (February 22–27, 2026), I had the privilege of participating as a mentor in a couple of “Career Conversations and Coffee” events where students and early-career scientists could learn about career opportunities from ocean science professionals representing government, academia, industry, and nonprofit organizations. Mentors were scattered among a dozen or more tables, and mentees were assigned tables that aligned with their career interests.

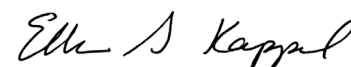
After I provided some background about my own career trajectory, discussions wandered depending on the interests of the mentees (generally about half dozen at each table at any one time). Both mornings, participants had plenty of questions, and I stayed well beyond the scheduled end time. At one meeting, I emphasized—as I often do when engaging with students and early-career professionals—the importance of going to the office every day. Having worked in a vibrant office for a dozen years and then from a home office for more than 25, I am very familiar with the advantages and pitfalls of a remote work environment.

Much to my surprise, the early career folks I was speaking with lit up when I raised this issue. They said that they like their remote work situation but are being forced to go back to the office by their employers, with potential consequences if they do not. They commented that their employers never articulated the benefits of returning to an office environment, a lack of communication that created some bad feelings and misunderstandings.

Although the debate regarding remote versus in-office work environments seems like an old story by now, my discussions with these early-career scientists encouraged me to write (again) about this subject. If rising professionals were lacking information about the benefits of going to an office, perhaps others were, too. So, I offer the following benefits of working in an office environment.

1. In-person participation in a team with shared goals and daily interactions with more senior staff is critical for professional development. Such engagement of course requires that the older generation be present in the office as well.
2. Interactions with staff you otherwise might have no reason to connect with may prove to be consequential. Aside from scientific colleagues, there is a lot to learn from technical and administrative staff and others who facilitate your work—or someone else's. Things you learn from an accountant, a contracts officer, or an HR manager might turn out to be very useful in your career.
3. In the office, you can get meaningful feedback on your work, sooner rather than later. Nothing in Zoom, Teams, Google Meet, Slack, or email is the same as walking to the next office and asking a colleague for input. That quick exchange or a longer discussion invariably improves your work.
4. Sometimes unplanned interactions can open doors. You bump into a colleague while getting a cup of coffee and exchange ideas or discuss issues. Who knows where those kinds of relationships may lead someday? Any exchange can be part of developing connections and trust so that you can do your job better and advance your career.

There are, of course, other advantages to being in the office every day. One web site I found listed 18. But, to underscore the importance of simply “being there,” the early career professionals I spoke with gained some valuable information by attending a conference in person and by randomly being assigned to me as a mentor. You just never know where such serendipitous encounters may lead and what you might learn.



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