

I have never gone so long without...

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It was while sitting at the dining room table, bashing away at the laptop desperately trying to ignore my co-worker (wife) who is a lot noisier on the phone than she gives herself credit for being, that one of her booming contacts quips: "I have never gone so long without..."

Glaring moodily across the table, noticing it needs dusting – again – peering through the forest of monitors, pondering the need for so much advertising on the techie things that dominate all home-working environments... and eyes meet.

Her's narrow slightly and an unspoken waspish message is delivered: "You make a hell of a lot more noise with your booming, guffawing voice – you great oaf."

Silently looking down at the keyboard, avoiding the inevitable squabble about who has the right to make calls (and when), mulling how life was so much simpler when she was furloughed.

During those 3 months, she rose religiously at 11am... once again surprised at how much sleep she's getting these days, while bags dominate for the listener. Then starts the process of whiling away another afternoon reading or strumming the guitar (if I never hear Ode To Joy again, it will be too soon), to balefully stare accusingly as 5.30pm rolls past.

Eye contact minimal.

Silence thickens.

6pm approaches.

Eyes dart suggestively towards the cocktail shaker.

Dining table typist engrossed in screens, studiously avoiding piercing glare (while also thinking that a Martini would be just the business).

Conversation turns frequently to the contentious topic of whether white wine actually constitutes an alcoholic drink, and at what time it is socially acceptable to pop the cork. Have you noticed that screw tops are in decline and that cork is making a return? In-depth research into the subject suggests that the tide has turned on this front.

But that's an aside and maybe bit too much of a window into our lockdown... without going into the finer points of a well-shaken Martini (gin, not vodka), or a cheeky Gibson of a Tuesday evening, possibly even that celebratory Wednesday sundowner (the sun is dipping at 6pm) of an Aviation.

But back to the story in hand...

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Screeches of laughter from the dining room cuckoo as she paces "our office", obliterating the peace that had ruled for 90 days, chatting with her now-bearded source about this and that (she's right, I really don't listen) and he quips: "I have never gone so long without..."

In his case it was shaving which struck a chord as I stroke a beard in dire need of trimming and behold flowing lockdown locks that last saw a barber in early March... and it set this infra hack's mind to what other people had gone without.

Reaching out this week to a mass of infrastructure types around the world and the responses to the titular question were somewhat revealing.

Hair is a repeat theme for those who are blessed with a full head thereof. They bemoan the return to a fashion style that possibly pervaded when a lot younger, while others tap into a rebellious nature that suggests they ain't returning to a short-back-and-sides any time soon. One source complains that Zoom brings to light a worrying number of mullets.

Unsurprisingly, many came back saying this was the longest they had ever gone without having enjoyed a pulled pint. On that front, I will save the blushes of the infrastructure lender (bit of a household name – mostly because he makes it so) who hot-footed it to Stockholm in March so he could blow the head off a few. However, on the flip side it came as a shock to hear that one source had never gone so long without a hangover... which is just ridiculous.

Work travel is a repeat response, but it's hard to tell whether people are happy or unhappy about the lack of air miles they've logged. Some seem to be relieved to have had a well-deserved break from airport hopping, while others are clearly champing at the bit to dust off the passport. Meanwhile, one infra investor says he has never gone so long since waking up and wondering where he was... though another bemoans the lack of excuses for not being at home.

Long lunches and socialising top bill for many, while others celebrate not having ironed a single item of clothing for a half-year, or doing up the top button, or wearing long trousers and shoes. Me, I have set myself a challenge to wear shorts and flip flops into October.

The list is endless – from shaking hands to a socially-acceptable cough, being forced to work in a paperless “office”, having a pint and sparking unfounded rumours, lodging / approving expenses, eating over-priced sandwiches, doing the *Evening Standard* Sudoku on the way home, “pleasantries with people I can't be bothered with”, and one (clearly a younger source) who missed “going for a boogie”.

One thing nobody seems to miss the commute – armpits in face and nose-picking commuters – while few seem to miss the office. Funny that.

One was even kind enough to suggest they missed speaking to me... but I think that was a joke.

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