

# It's time to implement a 4-day workweek, Andrew Yang says. The pandemic has made it more important than ever.

By Lauren Frias • **Business Insider**



Andrew Yang speaks during a Democratic presidential primary debate in December.  
*Justin Sullivan/Getty Images*

The former Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang told *Business Insider* that the US was past due to implement a four-day workweek to better accommodate American workers.

As health experts say that life as we know it may not return until next year, Yang told *Business Insider* in an interview that a four-day workweek could be more imperative than ever.

“It would help get us off of this hamster wheel that we're on right now, where we're all sort of racing against the clock in service of this like giant capital-efficiency machine,” Yang said. “And the race is driving us all crazy.”

“All of the key drivers that make your business a more successful business will improve as a consequence of this strategy,” Andrew Barnes, a cofounder of the nonprofit platform 4 Day Week Global, told *Business Insider*.

Two company founders agreed with Barnes' assessment, saying that not only would a company reap the benefits of such a policy, but employees would have a better work-life balance.

The coronavirus pandemic has forced some Americans to adjust to life within the confines of their own homes. As many employees (other than those deemed essential) work remotely, companies have attempted to adapt their offices with safety precautions in mind — if they intend to reopen them at all.

In May, Andrew Yang, the entrepreneur and former Democratic presidential candidate, floated the idea of implementing a four-day workweek to better accommodate working Americans in a time of uncertainty, saying a shorter workweek could have mental-health benefits for employees.

There's not one overarching definition of a four-day workweek. "There are different models for the shortened week, some of which envision the same output condensed into fewer hours while others simply imagine longer hours spread over fewer days," a *Washington Post* report said.

Some involve a three-day weekend, while others mean a day off midweek. Yang tweeted in May that "3-Day weekends are better than 2-Day weekends."

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In a Harris poll conducted in late May, 82% of employed US respondents said they would prefer to have a shorter workweek, even if it meant longer workdays.

The idea of a shorter workweek has become so popular in Finland that Prime Minister Sanna Marin has called for employers to allow employees to work only six hours a day, four days a week. In New Zealand, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern proposed the policy as part of a coronavirus economic recovery effort.

Andrew Barnes, the CEO of Perpetual Guardian, introduced a four-day workweek at his company in New Zealand in 2018.

Barnes, a cofounder of the nonprofit platform 4 Day Week Global and the author of "The 4 Day Week," said he found that "stress levels drop, creativity goes up, team cohesion goes up" under such a policy.

"It's also part of what is making it so hard for so many workers to find a place in our workforce," Yang said, "because our entire culture is so efficiency - obsessed that we are replacing workers with machines and software and math."

"So, to me, a four-day workweek is overdue," he added. "It would be immensely helpful to all of us."

Microsoft experimented with a four-day workweek last year at a subsidiary in Japan as part of its "Work-Life Choice Challenge." The subsidiary closed every Friday in August and said it saw productivity jump by 40% compared with the previous year.

"All of the key drivers that make your business a more successful business will improve as a consequence of this strategy," Barnes told *Business Insider*. "So, actually, if you want to have a successful business, not doing this is actually the bigger issue."

"The world has now said, 'Actually, we have this great experiment called COVID-19,'" he added. "We're questioning how the world will work and shape going forward. Your biggest risk now is not getting ahead, because to get ahead of the curve, you've got to introduce something like this."

Barnes, an entrepreneur himself, said that having a four-day workweek didn't necessarily mean having a three-day weekend. Instead, he said, it should accommodate the time constraints of individual employees while accomplishing the company's goals.

"In our business, some people will take a day off. Some people will take two half-days. Some people will work five days, but they will work compressed hours," he said. "So what we're talking about is a reduction in the working week. Not everybody comes out with a three-day weekend. For some people it is, but for a lot of people, actually, the last thing they want is to have a three-day weekend."

Shorter workweeks might be even more valuable now

Since the pandemic began, the shorter workweek has become "even more valuable now than it has been ever before," said Robert Yuen, a cofounder of the software firm Monograph.

Yuen has had a four-day-workweek policy at the company since 2016. Yuen told *Business Insider* that working from home had blurred the line on work-life balance and that implementing a four-day workweek could help to restore that.

"When you're working from home, there's a little bit less of a barrier between when to stop and when to start," he said. "It's just a little bit murkier between work-and-life separation, just because you're not navigating to the office anymore, and your office might be your bedroom or your office might be your kitchen now."

"So I think naturally most people are actually working more now than they have prior," he said. "Having a really dedicated mental break to kind of relax and recharge is even more central today than it ever was."

Yuen said he had "experimented and tried different ways of operating the 40-hour workweek," eventually finding a system that worked best for his company.

"The first approach was, like, taking Fridays off, which I think is the natural way of thinking, like, 'Oh, we have a Friday off and have a long weekend every weekend,'" he said. "Well, we learned really quickly that that was not super ideal for productivity. Like, a three-day weekend is just really a long time away from work, which made Monday feel a lot harder to get back into rhythm."

He said the company "finally landed on a really ideal situation" where employees work on Mondays and Tuesdays, take Wednesdays off, then work on Thursdays and Fridays.

The limits of a 4-day workweek

Yuen said that while it had worked well for his company, such a policy is not a "one-shoe-fits-all scenario."

The coronavirus pandemic has brought into sharp relief the jobs can be done at home and those that cannot — and the four-day workweek also likely has industry limitations.

Yuen said he thinks a shortened workweek "absolutely has impacts if you're in an industry that is hourly and you get paid per hour and then all of a sudden you've just lost eight hours of pay that you normally would get."

"I can see that those types of industries having a struggle implementing a four-day workweek," Yuen said. "I think we have to go case by case, company by company, and industry by industry to determine if this type of work fits."

Art Sheckman, the president and founder of Elephant Ventures, a software and data-engineering company, began a four-day workweek trial at the beginning of August; Friday is the designated day off.

Sheckman said he found that working longer days to make up for the Friday hours had removed some feelings of guilt and anxiety from working remotely but having to take time out of the day to tend to things at home, like taking care of his 9-year-old twin girls.

“There's, like, this cycle of guilt of having to pencil time out, and the anxiety that the day is happening without you while you're punching the time out to take care of whatever you need to do,” he told *Business Insider*. “When you remove that anxiety loop and the guilt loop later in the day, you get to stay in that productivity zone the whole rest of the day.”

He added that “from a morale and mental-tax standpoint of accommodating just everything that normally happens with trying to work from home, it's been fantastic.”

Charlotte Lockhart, another cofounder of 4 Day Week Global, said that employers “need to remember that we borrow people from their lives.”

“What we learned was that different people want different types of time off, and therefore we have to create a lifestyle that they can work productively but still have appropriate time off, because our ability to work from home or some other place isn't necessarily uniform,” she told *Business Insider*.

Yang recalled the models of the British economist John Maynard Keynes, who in 1930 predicted that technological change and the vast levels of wealth it generated would lead to a 15-hour workweek.

“He was correct about the level of wealth, but obviously incorrect on our workweeks, which have gotten longer, not shorter,” Yang said. “So it's past time we head in the right direction and implement a four-day workweek, which would help us all.”