

# Christopher Herd

Born 1990. Remote working entrepreneur.  
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# 1. \$13 Million Investment

*The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Businesswire website at [www.businesswire.com](http://www.businesswire.com). The article was published in April 2021.*



*Firstbase co-founders Trey Bastian (CTO) left, and Chris Herd, CEO right.*

Firstbase, a provider of remote infrastructure for global teams, today announced \$13 million in funding, with a Series A round led by Andreessen Horowitz, with participation from B Capital Group, and Alpaca VC. This follows a \$2 million seed investment led by Alpaca in August 2020 with participation from Acceleprise, Remote First Capital and Backend Capital. The new capital will fuel the company’s rapid growth plans through hiring, product development and increased customer deployment. Firstbase also announced it has added Andreessen Horowitz’s David Ulevitch to its Board of Directors.

“Most organizations underestimate the complexity and cost of going remote. Typically, HR, IT and facilities teams are involved in getting a single employee set up with hardware, access and security”

Firstbase’s mission is to improve individuals’ quality of life by enabling remote work. Its software platform helps companies set up, manage, maintain and retrieve all physical equipment remote workers need to work from home comfortably and effectively. From laptops and monitors, to mics and headsets, and ergonomic chairs and adjustable desks, Firstbase handles deployment of assets, IT installation and upgrades, ongoing repairs, culture and perks, and asset collection when a worker leaves.

“Most organizations underestimate the complexity and cost of going remote. Typically, HR, IT and facilities teams are involved in getting a single employee set up with hardware, access and security,” said Chris Herd, Co-founder and CEO of Firstbase. “With so many people involved, mistakes are often made, costs are incurred and time is wasted. Our solution removes the hassle and friction from the remote setup and promises a better experience for everyone - emotionally, logistically and financially. The same is true on the other end, when an employee leaves, we take the headache out of collecting, tracking and redeploying the equipment.”

Firstbase, headquartered in the U.K. and New York, was founded in 2019 by Chris Herd and Trey Bastian. The entrepreneurs were initially forming a fintech startup, but quickly pivoted their focus when they identified the common equipment infrastructure challenge among their business customers. Herd, a former operations manager, was responsible for outfitting oil rigs in remote locations. He saw firsthand that it was expensive, time-consuming, and nearly impossible to get assets back when they were deployed remotely. As a Staff Sergeant in the U.S. Airforce, Bastian managed the deployment, support and training of mission critical cybersecurity systems and technical infrastructure in the most challenging environments globally. Applying what they learned in these environments to the obstacles of physical provisioning for remote office workers, exacerbated by a global pandemic, led to the creation of Firstbase.

### **The Physicality of Remote Work**

The adoption of remote work is estimated to have been accelerated by 15 years by the pandemic. This seismic shift caused companies of all sizes to scramble to get employees up and running comfortably and securely from remote locations. However, the cross-functional logistics of ordering, shipping, setting up, managing, repairing and eventually collecting the physical assets needed to perform a function couldn't be executed overnight. Approximately 5 hours of time and nearly \$3,500 is required to set up a single hire. By comparison, Firstbase's platform centralizes the entire process in 30 seconds with an affordable monthly subscription. The subscription allows a company to establish its own unique catalogue of available inventory and the worker to select the equipment and tools to fit his or her individual needs. Then, every aspect of order fulfillment and delivery is outsourced to Firstbase, essentially providing an infrastructure-as-a-service. Ongoing, Firstbase serves as a single source of truth, enabling organizations to seamlessly manage their assets.

### **The Benefits of Flexible Location**

According to a recent Prodoscore survey, there are nearly 255 million desk jobs globally and an estimated 90% of these workers have expressed an

affinity for working from home. Hybrid and flexible WFH policies will be the new norm, providing an HR benefit for employees and improving businesses' operating costs. Estimates predict that if U.S. workers split their time 50/50 between the office and home, organizations could save nearly \$1 trillion on IT management costs and offset real estate costs by 50-90%, depending on the frequency workers are expected to attend in person.

"With a permanent shift in attitudes toward remote and hybrid work, employees and companies are more reliant on their equipment and workspace to stay connected and productive than ever before," said David Ulevitch, General Partner at Andreessen Horowitz. "Firstbase is the critical infrastructure that will power the distributed workforce. Employees get the setup they need to stay effective working from home and employers have a centralized view and management system for all equipment. Firstbase is really leading the charge into the future of work."

Firstbase's software is currently in use with customers with remote workers across the U.S. and Europe, including: TaxJar, Hey Summit, Recording Academy, Robin Healthcare, Clubhouse, SureSwift Capital, Edify, Filtered, DMT, Elemendar, Italic, Zego and Verse. The new capital will be used to triple Firstbase's workforce over the next year, making key hires across product development, marketing, and sales. The company also intends to increase integration with HR and collaboration software partners and update its customer experience to quickly convert its 10,000+ waitlisted organizations.

### **About Firstbase**

Firstbase is a remote work SaaS platform providing organizations with a centralized source to track and manage physical equipment assets. Founded in 2019, just six months before the COVID-19 pandemic forced workers globally to go remote, thousands of organizations have turned to Firstbase to expedite the setup of secure, reliable and comfortable remote work environments that promote productivity. To date Firstbase has helped more than 1,500+ individuals work remotely and is adding 350+ each month. Firstbase is headquartered in Scotland and New York.

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## 2. A Scottish Story

*The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the website of the Aberdeen Press and Journal at [www.pressandjournal.co.uk](http://www.pressandjournal.co.uk). The article was by Keith Findlay, and was published in April 2021.*

An Aberdonian's transatlantic software start-up is today announcing a \$13 million (£9.3m) funding deal.

Granite City-based Chris Herd, 31, has gone from architecture studies at Robert Gordon University (RGU), jobs in the oil and gas industry and Highland League football to multi-million-pound-backed entrepreneurship in little more than a decade. He teamed up with Trey Bastian, a former Stirling University computer science student and ex-US air force staff sergeant, to launch Firstbase in 2019.

Their business' potential became more apparent last year as much of the world went into lockdown and working from home became the norm for many people.



*Existing investors include BrewDog co-founder and CEO James Watt.*

### **Equipment management**

The American-registered firm helps other companies set up, manage, maintain and retrieve all the equipment remote workers need.

From laptops and monitors to microphones, headsets, ergonomic chairs and adjustable desks, the Firstbase platform handles the deployment of assets,

IT installation and upgrades, ongoing repairs and collections when a worker leaves.

The latest cash injection follows a \$2m (£1.4m) seed funding round, led by New York-based venture capitalist Alpaca VC, last year. Alpaca is also a participant in the latest fundraising – led by Silicon Valley-headquartered Andreessen Horowitz, which backs “bold entrepreneurs building the future through technology”.

B Capital Group, which links entrepreneurs and funders, while also investing in business-to-business technology start-ups, is another participant. The new capital is expected to fuel Firstbase’s growth through hiring, product development and increased sales. Firstbase is also adding Andreessen Horowitz’s partner David Ulevitch to its board.

Mr Herd, the company’s chief executive, joined the oil and gas industry after leaving RGU armed with a masters degree in architecture. He was a project engineer with Integrated Catering Equipment and then Aiken Group, and had a couple of other jobs before launching his first venture, a fintech business, in 2018.

The former Hazlehead Academy pupil’s footballing exploits saw him playing in defence for Turriff United, Inverurie Locos and Huntly before hanging up his boots to focus on Firstbase.

“Most organisations underestimate the complexity and cost of going remote,” Mr Herd said, adding: “Our solution removes the hassle and friction from the remote set-up and promises a better experience for everyone – emotionally, logistically and financially.” Firstbase currently has an 11-strong team scattered across different locations in the UK and US, working with thousands of customers on both sides of the Atlantic.

### **Family fish and chips**

Mr Herd, whose parents run three fish and chip shops in Aberdeen, said the company’s workforce was likely to grow to 50 within a year.

With a permanent shift in attitudes toward remote and hybrid work, employees and companies are more reliant on their equipment and workspace to stay connected and productive than ever before.

Mr Ulevitch said: “Firstbase is the critical infrastructure that will power the distributed workforce.”

“Employees get the setup they need to stay effective working from home, and employers have a centralised view and management system for all equipment. Firstbase is really leading the charge into the future of work.”

### 3. New Yorker Interview

*The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the New Yorker website at [www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com). The article was written by Cal Newport, and was published in September 2021.*

Earlier this month, a technology entrepreneur named Chris Herd posted a thread on Twitter. “I spoke to 10 x Billion \$ companies who canceled return to the office due to the delta variant,” he began. “A few predictions on what else is going to happen.” His first salvo was titled “Office Death,” and claimed that “by the time people can return to the office a lot of companies will no longer have space to return to.” His next prediction was about “City Flight.” He stated that workers would continue to flee cities and would quit if their employers forced them back into urban offices. The thread continued with sixteen more tweets.

In 2018, Herd, who is thirty-one, started a financial-technology company based in northern Scotland. He soon realized the difficulty of attracting talent to his location, and organized his business to operate without a physical headquarters. Impressed by the benefits of his office-free operation, Herd pivoted into a new company, Firstbase, which supports a remote-work infrastructure. In 2019, he began tweeting strident objections to office work, with loud claims about the superiority of alternatives. When the pandemic hit, the audience interested in these discussions exploded in size. In early 2020, Herd posted a long thread of predictions about remote work’s rise during the next decade, and it hit a nerve in a way that his earlier tweets had not. His follower count grew from about a thousand to over forty-five thousand, and his threads became must-reads for anyone who closely followed these topics. Many commentators have been discussing the need for a more flexible approach to when and where work happens in a post-pandemic world. Herd, it turns out, is proposing something altogether more radical.

When knowledge work became a major economic sector in the twentieth century, the necessity to have employees work together around stationary machinery, as in the classic factory model, was curtailed. There remained, however, secondary forces that preserved co-location. Knowledge work requires collaboration and access to information, both of which are conveniently served when individuals are physically near shared conference rooms and filing cabinets. Meanwhile, during this point of transition, companies had already become familiar with the industrial idea of managers’ monitoring employees as they toiled in the same space, going so far as to adapt the standardized nine-to-five work shift into the white-collar world. The result was the rise of what we might call the office-as-factory model: the idea that, whether the work is physical or cognitive, we

should gather in the same building to work together under close supervision during the same hours.

The arrival of personal computers in the nineteen-nineties, followed by the spread of high-speed Internet in the two-thousands, upended this status quo by obviating the need for individuals to be in the same building to collaborate or access information. These technological innovations led to an incipient telecommuting revolution that began to pick up speed in the first decade of the twenty-first century. This revolution, however, eventually lost its momentum as managers experimenting with remote-working arrangements realized that dispersing the efforts that used to take place in the office was more complicated than simply giving employees video-conferencing software and an e-mail address.

The resulting frictions led large companies such as Yahoo and Best Buy, which had introduced more flexible work arrangements in the first decade of the two-thousands, to pull workers back into their cubicles by the beginning of the second. It's also why now, after seventeen months of pandemic-induced building closures in the United States, so many large companies are looking to return their workers to the office just as soon as coronavirus infection rates make it feasible. It seems that even in our current moment of disruption, the office-as-factory model remains entrenched. It's here that we return to Chris Herd, who has a decidedly different take.

As Herd told me when we spoke, people are sometimes surprised to learn that he's against the idea of remote-only companies, in which employees never collaborate in person. "The quality of your work is increased by having time together," he said, "because you have a better sense of shared empathy and coordination." The problem, he clarifies, is the belief that the best way to support these interactions is by signing a long-term lease on an office building that you force your employees to use every week.

In Herd's vision, which he calls a remote-first strategy, relevant teams gather less frequently—he suggests once a month as a good interval—in varying locations that suit the work that's being done. Because these meetings are relatively infrequent, there's no need for employees to live in the same region.

He used his own company as an example to illustrate this point. "We are all over the place: we have people in Belgium and the U.K., in the U.S. from the East Coast to the West," he said. "Our tech team is meeting in New York next week. Our sales team is meeting in London the week after." He even imagines a future in which specialized resorts will arise in locations conducive to brainstorming or strategy formation, where teams will work with the help of professional on-site facilitators. These semi-frequent off-site gatherings might sound expensive to those steeped in the office-as-



factory mind-set, but, Herd suggested, they're cheaper than maintaining a permanent space for everyone, and such meetings would support much of what's lost in a purely virtual strategy.

The bigger advantage of Herd's approach, however, is that it significantly increases the size of the pool of potential hires. "A remote-first company can access the best talent in the world," he said. "An office-first company can only access those who live within a certain radius of their building." Again and again in our conversation, Herd emphasized the power of this factor. "In a knowledge-based economy, your value is the talent you employ. If other companies employ better talent, they are better than you."

It's these two features of remote-first work—its decreased overhead and increased access to talent—that lead to the most striking element of Herd's theory. This style of work, he claims, is not simply an interesting, if slightly esoteric, alternative for those looking to try something different from the office-as-factory model; it's inevitably going to replace the office model completely—a transformative process that is, in fact, already under way.

In Herd's explanation, a Darwinian business dynamic has come into play. If you and I run companies competing in the same space, and I have better talent and lower staffing costs, I'll put you out of business. Repeat this enough times, with enough competitors, and the remote-first model will rise to dominate our market niche. Herd pointed to technology startups, a sector already known for its intense competition and survival-induced innovation, as an arena in which this evolution is currently occurring with particular intensity.

He highlighted Hopin, a virtual-events startup founded in the summer of 2019, whose founder and C.E.O., Johnny Boufarhat, is an investor in Firstbase. When the pandemic hit, in March, 2020, Hopin had eight employees. Recognizing that conditions had suddenly become quite favorable for a company supporting virtual events, Hopin quickly grew to eight hundred employees and a valuation of over seven billion dollars, all the while keeping the company remote. "If you talked to their C.E.O., he would tell you they couldn't have built the company the way they did, from eight to eight hundred employees in months, if they were in an office," Herd said.

Because startups build their organizational cultures from scratch, they can sidestep the need to rework existing management structures and habits that depend on an office. This is an important advantage, as it's exactly this difficulty that has consistently impeded widespread adoption of stronger remote policies in larger companies. Herd argues, however, that the knowledge forged in the startup crucible about how to make these arrangements work will inevitably migrate to larger corporations. "The innovation happens at startups operating at the periphery," Herd said. "But

what you are going to see are remote-working experts emerge who transition from the startups to bigger companies, and then from there to even bigger companies, passing on that knowledge as they go.”

Herd thinks that, within the technology sector, the big monopolies will be the last to make this change, as the competitive advantages of the remote-first model mean less when you have few competitors. But even these giants are vulnerable to the pressure of losing talent. This might even partly explain why Apple, which announced this past summer that employees would have to return to the office this fall, has delayed its reopening to January or later. The company cites the Delta variant as the reason for this shift, but when you consider the muted covid rates in the ultra-vaccinated Bay Area—on the mid-September day that I’m writing this, there are only seventeen covid patients in I.C.U.s in all of San Francisco—it’s reasonable to suspect that the widespread employee pushback against the original declaration may also be playing a role.

The final phase of the transition, according to Herd’s theory, is the further migration of this remote-first methodology from tech to other economic sectors. We’ve seen workplace trends spread from tech outward before (think: open offices), but Herd argues that this particular shift will be accelerated by the involvement of private equity. These firms, he predicts, will begin hiring away remote-first experts from big technology companies. They will then buy up companies in other sectors, deploy this expertise to help them successfully abandon long-term office leases, and hire better talent, allowing them to reap the rewards of the immediate profitability boosts that these moves generate.

To return to our natural-selection metaphor, the vision prophesied by Herd is not one of a glacially slow incremental evolution toward a new species of work but, rather, an instance of punctuated equilibrium, in which the leap from startups like Hopin to blue-chip giants will occur seemingly all at once.

It’s important, of course, to receive this vision with a healthy skepticism. Beyond Herd’s obvious vested interest in the future trending toward the remote, it struck me that the need to jet to locations each month to meet with your worldwide team seems to introduce its own burdens. There are also clear and long-understood advantages to gathering pools of similarly skilled talent in the same city—be it tech-boom San Francisco or Renaissance Florence—as a catalyst for innovation. And the capital infusion into technology companies in recent years is so astronomical that staffing overhead can hardly be identified as a critical factor in predicting corporate survival. (Hopin recently received a four-hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar investment. The operation could likely lease a half-dozen office buildings without seriously denting its burn rate.)

All this being said, however, there's an insistent economic logic to Herd's prognostications that separate them from much of the existing advocacy for remote work, which tends to focus myopically on the benefits to the employee, and to sweep aside the challenges of making these arrangements work. Even if some of the details of Herd's predictions aren't accurate, his broad points demand to be taken seriously. The office-as-factory model is not fundamental, but was instead a temporary solution to support collaboration and information access in a pre-digital world dominated by management ideas from industrial manufacturing.

The remote-first alternative has been technologically possible for a while now but has been held back by the difficulties of reorienting organizational culture away from the office. Once expertise in these new kinds of arrangements emerges in the world of tech startups, it might spark the spread of this model with sudden speed across the knowledge economy.

All of this was on my mind recently when my family gathered with some friends at a brewpub that had set up seats in the courtyard of a classic high-end office park, built next to a metro station in suburban Washington, D.C. All around us were empty windows plastered with "Space for Lease" signs. That same day, Herd had tweeted a simple declaration: "Remote resets broken ways of living." As I surveyed the empty offices, evidence perhaps that Herd's vision was already unfolding, I was struck by an urgent thought: I really hope that's right.

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## 4. Paul Estes Interview

The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Staffing.com website at [www.staffing.com](http://www.staffing.com). It is the transcript of an interview of Chris Herd by Staffing.com editor Paul Estes.

Paul Estes:

At the onset of this pandemic, many of us thought that we'd be at home for a few weeks initially setting up shop in our kitchens, living rooms. And even our kids' rooms as weeks have turned into months. Now, many companies - just like Laurel was talking about - are increasingly accelerating change in their policies as it relates to remote work. This includes the physical products, the desks, the chairs, the headsets, and other perks that are automatically incorporated in onsite offices - office experiences. Today, I'm really excited to talk with Chris Herd about how his company Firstbase is addressing this need. As founder and CEO of Firstbase, Chris Herd is committed to empowering people to work their lives, not live their work. Chris has led and managed remote teams while working in renovation and construction and also founded a company in fintech. What was initially an internal product to help his company manage those logistics soon evolved into Firstbase, the only all-in-one provisioning platform that allows companies to provide the best possible at-home remark, kind of remote working experience at the touch of a button.

Chris, welcome to the show. Very cool. So first, I want to talk to you, we were talking a little bit, you know, prior to this, you know, you are an advocate of remote work and an evangelist. And so is Laurel, and when I look at Laurel, how she talks about remote work, you know, she does a lot of consulting with people and really helping a lot of change management. The work that you do, or at least the way I see you on social media, is that you're really passionate and, and sort of pull back the veil and talk truth and, and try to, to really ignite a conversation. Help me understand what led you to be so passionate about remote work. And we'll get into the company and the other work that you're doing.

Chris Herd:

Yeah. I think it started with just experiencing it ourselves as a team when we were founding that fintech businesses, you mentioned them. Yeah. Just realizing the quality of life increase that came from that. Not having to live in a high-cost-of-living city, having more time with family, being able to do things that we really cared about, and that just came as a byproduct of working remotely. And I think a lot of people have trouble believing that the benefits of remote can be as large as I think many people may make

out. And I think it's, it's something that's difficult to appreciate until you've really experienced that yourself.

Paul Estes:

Now you're really public out in, in social media and in many other places. What sort of feedback are you getting from people that that say, Hey look, we're, we're going back to the way things were before this remote work thing is, is interesting, but what kind of feedback are you getting when you, when you do your posts?

Chris Herd:

I think it varies. I think it's, it certainly goes back three months ago, and there were a lot of skeptics who just fundamentally never believed that remote work was going to happen as quickly as it has. So, yeah, certainly there was an element of projection that I think everyone in this space has made, and obviously, the virus has accelerated that by 10 years. So I think across the last two months or so, people's opinion has changed now that they've experienced that. They know remote work works and that it was really difficult to dispute that when companies have experienced such scale like they have.

Paul Estes:

We often talk about when we talk about remote work, we often talk about the ROI and the productivity increase. But there was a post today that you said something that really resonated with the Hobby read Renaissance, and it reminded me of a book I just finished called *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* where Robert Putnam talks about how disconnected we are and it is at the central crisis of society. Help me understand how you think of the non-productivity, the non-ROI aspects of remote work in business.

Chris Herd:

I think we hear two real pushback elements from companies that are saying remote work will work for us. So the first part is well by the people that get their main social contact that works at work. And I just have a fundamental issue that actually your boss picking your friends is a good thing for society. I think actually that's a terrible thing for society. And the other part is, well actually we solve all our problems running the water-cooler. And they say that like it's a good thing. Like if you're solving problems around the work, who are, your processes are broken.

Paul Estes:

One of the things that is really interesting about you is you bootstrapped Firstbase while you were still playing semi-pro football and, and maybe

people know from your accent, I'll say soccer. For those in the US, how important has that community outside of the work you're doing inspired and been helpful to the work that you do today?

Chris Herd:

I think certainly for remote workers, it's about having those relationships and really being able to cultivate deep, meaningful relationships with people you share things in common with rather than just by that contract. We're trying to win inside work. And yeah, I think the way that I certainly look at it is that sitting with someone and really talking about inane stuff that's happening with the microcosm of work doesn't really lead to that. So yeah, I certainly think the big benefit of remote was having more time to do the things that you care about, whether that's being on your own or playing soccer or fishing. I think those external hobbies detach you from work and actually can help you build deeper, more meaningful relationships with people, which is more than the superficial relationships you can create in an office.

Paul Estes:

And I've also found that a lot of times, the things I've done outside of, you know, traditional work have given me ideas and have actually fed the professional work that I do. Let's talk a little bit about Firstbase. Tell me the moment when you realize that the way you had started working in the company and the internal processes that you were putting in place could solve a problem.

Chris Herd:

It started with what we really cared about, which was providing a great experience and culture to our teams. And I think what we realized super early on was that that started with the foundation on which you've done your work, and if you didn't have the right tools and equipment, it was incredibly difficult to do the best work you've ever done in your life. So, as our first employees joined that business, we tried to solve that for ourselves. We found out how expensive it was, time-consuming. We were just concerned about people getting injured because they'd never had the right stuff. Then we were just, I think, uniquely placed to solve that. We'd experienced the problem. My background was in putting literally the same equipment that we were putting in our, our workers' homes and places like oil rigs off the coast of Africa, floating production vessels in the Middle East. Then we solved that problem, and then probably far too long than we should have to realize the external utility of that for other people.

Paul Estes:

What's been the response as you've made this platform and an offering available?

Chris Herd:

I think it's obviously been something that's resonated even more deeply as this virus has taken hold, and companies have realized that actually, they don't have any great solutions for what, to, to tackle this problem. But I think even more so before that we were having conversations with companies where they knew they were going in this direction, but they were doing it more slowly. Now we're hearing that they're going to cut commercial real estate by up to 50%. And the implication of that is that everyone's going to work from home and they need to professionalize that remote work from home, set up an order, ensure people are safe and productive there.

Paul Estes:

Give me a scenario of a, like one of your major customers are the early adopters of the platform and the specific problem that they were trying to solve. If there's someone out there who might be grappling with this new idea of being asked to put it in a remote policy for their company, how should I think of the value of Firstbase and what specific problem it solves?

Chris Herd:

So we really help companies both supply and manage all the physical equipment and the remote workers need at home and that, and what we really mean by that is we provide a full-stack solution or a turnkey solution that takes care of every need that a company could have. So from the desks and chairs to the hardware and provisioning through to the ongoing perks that they may need, whether that's coffee machines, coffee beans, subscriptions, everything else. And I think there's probably three profiles where companies need us. If it's the chief people officer, it's about culture and experience. If it's the CIO, it's about its deployment. And if it's the VP of finance, they're interested in redistributing office space, the workers' homes, and cutting that expense at the touch of a button.

Paul Estes:

You know, when we were talking earlier, and if you don't want to share, that's fine, but, but there are other things that you're working on as you deploy Firstbase with, with customers that, that you think could solve problems. Do you want to talk about any of those? Because one of them was my favorite.

Chris Herd:

I think we look at a lot of remote products being created today, and we just see them as replicating the bad parts of office working. So the instantaneous gratification of available AI, which you experienced in the office where someone taps you on the shoulder and really disrupts and distracts you from what you're doing. So a waffle we focus on doing is creating the processes around making asynchronous flow better. And one part of that is an asynchronous meeting. So yeah, we're almost spitballing this in real time, but certainly, something we spent a lot of time thinking about is how can we ensure that our teams are more accountable. They've done the requisite educational piece prior at Coleman annual meetings and really productizing that in a similar way to how Amazon runs meetings but creating that system that really works. And yeah, that's about kind of like Dobson times type form where you can create this thing, you can measure who's read it, and then you can have an asynchronous feedback on that which is anonymous and then you can feed in a more synchronous flow where you really get the decision made which is better than getting 15 people sitting in an office for an hour and nobody really does anything.

Paul Estes:

Yeah, that was one of the things I really enjoyed when I worked at Amazon is that there was value in writing things down, and I do that a lot more now that I work at a fully distributed team cause we don't have a lot of time to sit and go back and forth. But also, there was an expectation that before you had a meeting, everybody would have read and commented on something. And so that even the first 15 minutes was you collecting your thoughts. When you look to customers going over the next 18 months or let's just look into 2021, how do you think companies will adopt homeworking as it relates to providing for the people? I know a lot of my friends, when they, you know, were suddenly remote, had to buy their own standup desks and, and you know, got card tables and kind of really, you know, put some stuff together. How do you think companies will be able to support people from a logistical standpoint as it relates to the things that, that you need to get your job done?

Chris Herd:

This is largely the problem in the arena that we're playing, and it's just actually super difficult for companies to do that. From the tracking of the materials to the delivery of it, to the ongoing maintenance to the collections when a worker leaves and yeah, really abstracting that complex AOA from the company and letting them just almost up like AWS does with the virtual world we let them do in the physical world. So they just add someone. We take care of all that complexity on the back end. And I think, I think everyone knows that the right tools and equipment are table stakes for doing great work. It's what you need to be to your point is safe,



comfortable, and productive at home as you would be in the office, and I think really in my eyes, that responsibility falls on the shoulders of the companies to provide that and yeah, it's probably going to be a real piece of differentiation where companies can show how much they care about their workers by taking care of their needs from that perspective.

Paul Estes:

And there's also some cost savings because they don't have to go to a physical office. One of the things that Dean and I were talking about at the beginning of the show was, you know, the world is not going to be binary in a lot of ways. There's still going to be places that have some offices and maybe 50% are remote. How do you think the role of the onsite office changes as everything you know, kind of finds its new resting place?

Chris Herd:

I think the reality is that people are going to spend time between both those areas. I think largely, you look, there are 255 million desk jobs globally. I would say by 2030, a majority of them are going to be done remotely, and majority of the time. But the reality is for two days a week, people are still probably going to go into some form of office where I suspect that probably becomes more of a destination. People go there with a specific reason in mind, whether that's collaboration, whether it's other things that become more obvious as we start to work remotely, and not really fewer people leverage the benefits of both to maximize productivity in both areas. You can do your deep work at home, you can do that collaborative piece when you're in the office.

Paul Estes:

That's great. Chris, thanks so much for joining us today. If anybody out there wants to be inspired or wants to be ignited about what's going on with remote work, Chris is full of facts, figures, and you know, talking some truth. So Chris, thanks so much and I look forward to talking to you again.

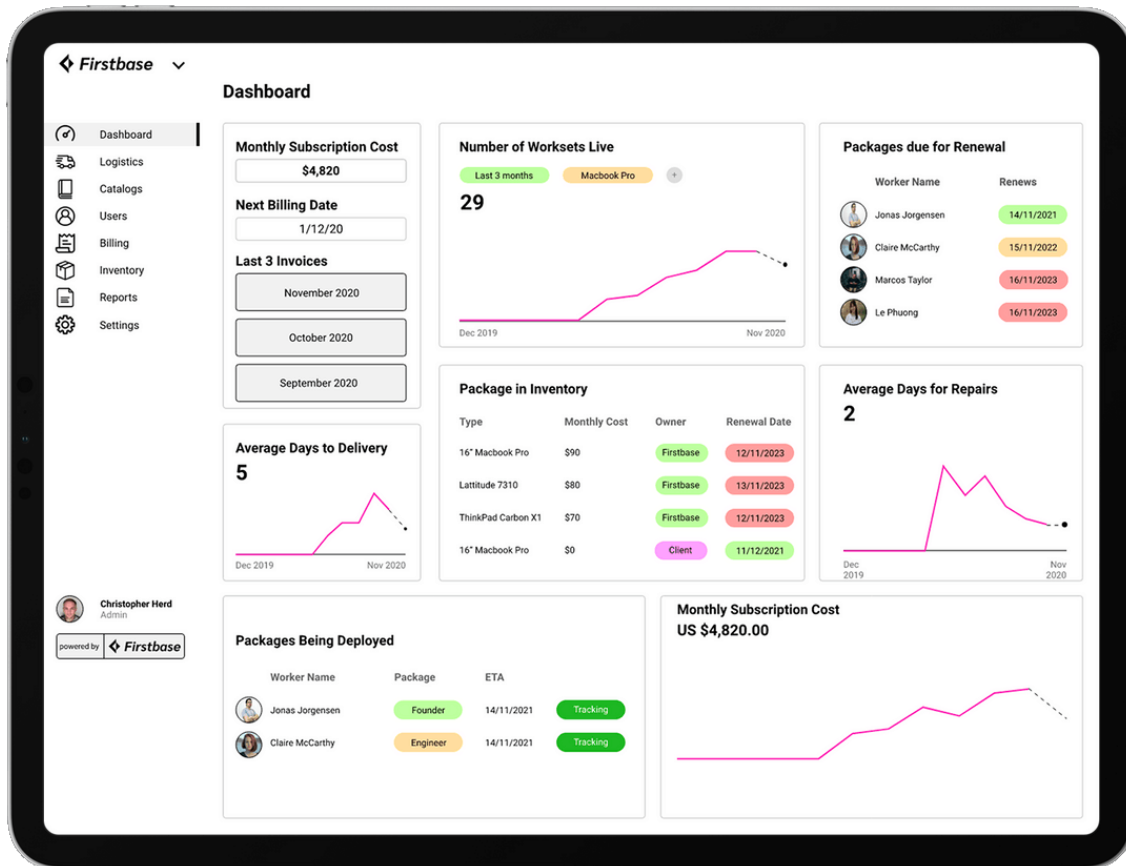
Chris Herd:

That's cool.

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## 5. The Firstbase Philosophy

The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Firstbase website at [www.firstbasehq.com](http://www.firstbasehq.com).



### On March 12th 2020 the world changed.

In the 15 months since remote work has accelerated 15 years into the future. Where prior to the pandemic only 3% of the US workforce worked remotely full-time, after the pandemic 10X that number will.

In number terms the change is enormous. 3-4M full-time workers operated remotely full-time in 2018. By 2030 that number looks set to grow to at least 80M workers. This should be considered the base case scenario. I expect that number to increase dramatically as millions of workers experience normal, healthy remote working for the first time.

What people have worked through in the last 15 months has been the worst possible version of remote work. Lockdown, homeschooling, unable to travel, can't see friends, little freedom to do the things that make us happiest. As a result, workers have not been able to experience the intangible benefits of remote. The things that make it 10X better than working in an office full-time. These things obviously won't return immediately, but eventually they will.

The rush of investment in solving problems remote workers have always faced will lead to many of them being better addressed than in the past. This investment will lead to the core infrastructure needed to enable remote work more easily to emerge rapidly. The thing standing in the way of companies going remote or becoming more remote friendly is typically the ease in which it can happen. As these barriers to entry get removed, remote becoming exponentially more widespread becomes almost inevitable. It ties back to the age old question of disruption.

What happened to companies that didn't adopt computers in the 1990's?

What happened to companies that didn't implement software in the 2000's?

What happened to companies that didn't embrace the internet in the 2010's?

What enabled each of those revolutions to happen was massive investment in each of these areas that led to tremendous innovation. The question today then becomes: what happens to every company that doesn't become remote?

The data coming out from almost every internal survey by companies of their own people tell the story of how revolutionary this will be. Habits and behaviors that have emerged during the pandemic have calcified and workers now know almost every knowledge-based job can be done remotely. Telling someone who has done an incredible job in the most difficult circumstances imaginable that they must again commute for 2H a day won't cut it.

Who wants to go back to wasting their life sat in a pollution emitting steel box, living in an expensive city with hard any disposable income, leaving behind family and friends in pursuit of opportunity when they no longer need to.

A recent report by Bloomberg stated that 40% of workers would rather quit than go back to the office full-time. For Millennials that number was even higher: 50%. Companies who try will find out whether workers mean it.

Some of the largest tech companies on the planet announced their intentions to go back to the office full-time in the future. What followed internally was entire departments in open revolt telling their leaders that if they went through with the plan they would quit for competitors who would let them work remotely.

The capitulation was inevitable. How quickly it happened was the only surprise. The trends of massive companies changing their approach to remote work suggests they have already realized that many people will follow through on this promise to leave.

## **Why is this happening now?**

Many of us live and work in a knowledge based economy. Sit at a desk and do most of your work on a computer? You are a knowledge worker. Stand a whiteboard and brainstorm ideas regularly? You are a knowledge worker.

In a knowledge economy, companies are the people they employ.

Don't have the most talented people? You aren't likely to be the most talented company in your space and more talented companies will crush you. To be the most talented company you need to have access to the most talented people. To have access to the most talented people you have to offer the flexibility to work remotely.

## **How big could remote work be?**

Not every job can be done remotely. The roles we are talking about are typically desk jobs. So the right place to start is with the question: how many desk jobs are there in the world? Today, there are 255M desk jobs globally.

The second question to ask is: how many jobs will be allowed to become remote? This is much more difficult to answer. There will of course be some pullback as companies try to return to the status quo.

What decides how many people work remotely won't be companies. It will be their people demanding it by rejecting a return to the office or eventually going back.

How do workers feel about the office:

95% of people never wanting to work in an office again-full time

70% of people want to work remotely 3+ days per week

40% people wanting to work remotely full-time

Sceptics remain. Oft-cited issues such as the burden of childcare, downsides of isolation on mental health, and not having enough space in tiny city centre apartments are fair questions asked of remote. Those things are challenges of pandemic-enforced work from home and not issues with remote working in normal times.

As lockdowns ease, childcare returns. As things start to unlock your ability to spend time working in coworking spaces around other people, grab coffee with friends, or work from a coffee shop a few hours a day becomes a possibility.

Young people living in shared apartments is more an implication of the high cost of living in cities, and needing to be close enough to commute daily rather than an issue with remote work. Which talks of the reality of

many of the perceived challenges of remote work. Many of the biggest issues with remote working are caused by pandemic remote work rather than normal remote work.

There is also the fact remote work is not necessarily what some people think it is.

Remote work does not mean you never see your teammates.

Remote work does not mean you work from home every day.

The trope around humans being “social animals” is a particularly odd reason to trumpet a need to return to the office. Remote work can be more social. You get to choose who you spend the most time with, typically the people you care about most, and you have greater opportunity to do the things that make you happiest due to having no commute.

That doesn't mean you never see your team. Rather, it enables you to be more purposeful about when you do and more focussed on increasing the quality of communication and collaboration when you do come together in person. Many remote teams have closer relationships with their colleagues as a result. Rather than the inane daily musings of current affairs that lead to shallow superficial relationships that typically lack depth, breadth or meaning, remote teams dig deeper when they have the chance to talk about more important things. If you doubt this, I'd ask how many people you still talk to regularly from your last job.

True remote work means working from wherever you do your best work. This is about evolving from the situation we have faced since the industrial revolution of work being designed for the collective. Remote work is about empowering every individual to design work around their own requirements in order to do the best work they have ever done.

That's the real remote work revolution and what we should be striving for.

The way to get there is to reframe what remote work is about.

Remote work isn't just the future of work. Most people really don't care about that.

Remote work is the future of living. That is something everyone can get behind.

### **The bull case for remote work**

Applying those statistics to the overall number of remote work provides a compelling argument towards the belief that a majority of the desk jobs globally will be done remotely a majority of the time by 2030. An astonishing 97% of want to work remotely after Covid. 50%+ want to work remotely a majority of the time.

At that scale, 128M+ jobs will be done remotely at least 3 days a week by 2030.

If we hit the higher end of that spectrum 247M+ jobs will be done remotely.

Of course, this assumes the number of desk jobs remains stagnant which won't be the case so that number is likely to grow significantly over the next decade.

Remote work promises to be the biggest workplace revolution in history. Companies that don't embrace remote work will be replaced by companies that do. The tale is as long as time and has many recent examples.

### **The Remote Work Dilemma**

Every company will be forced to go remote and become increasingly remote in order to remain competitive. Inevitably, more people will become remote as a result.

Any company that is less remote than it's biggest competitor will be:

Less Talented: because they can only hire the best person they can afford in a 30-mile radius of their office vs. remote companies who will hire the best talent they can afford globally

Less Cost-Efficient: because they will have to pay \$10K-\$50K per worker every year on office space vs. remote companies who will provide the best remote work experience on the planet for \$2K per worker each year.

Office-first companies will bleed talent while their costs remain flat, while their biggest competitors become more talented with lower overheads.

### **Amazon crushed JC Penney**

eCommerce crushed physical stores because it has better:

Cost  
Choice  
Convenience

Remote companies crush office-first companies for the same reason. This is only obvious with hindsight. It took the best part of 20 years for this to happen. Now when you walk down your local high street it has become a ghost town as shopping went virtual. Offices likely won't have the same grace. Where initially the internet grew slowly, hardly anyone bought anything online.

Soon, some people bought some things online. Eventually, most people bought some things online. Today, almost everyone buys a lot of things online.

The same thing will happen with remote and lead to the death of the full-time office. The only difference is that a global pandemic has been the catalyst to enact 15 years of change in 15 months. The habits and behaviours that have calcified since make it almost impossible for anyone to go back to the office full-time.

And the longer it lasts the more people who want to go to the office less. That doesn't mean that physical location won't still exist or be used. But they will become more experiential and be used far less frequently.

Full-time office work is dead. Long live remote work.

## **20 lessons 100+ leading remote companies taught us about building a great remote team**

Over the last 3 years, we've spoken to 100+ of the leading remote-first companies on the planet. These are the 20 lessons they taught us about how to build a great remote team

1. **Documentation:** documentation is the unspoken superpower of remote teams. The most successful remote companies write down and record knowledge rather than lose it if people leave. Knowledge grows and is improved over time as everyone contributes to a repository of intelligence.
2. **Asynchronous:** remote work is a bridge to async work. The best remote companies aim to avoid replication of the disruptions of the office. Async work empowers individuals to do deep focussed work without distraction.
3. **Flexibility:** to attract the most talented people you need to be flexible to individual needs. Office-first companies are one size fits all which work perfectly for nobody – remote is the opposite. Pick your kids up from school, surf before dawn, work when you do your best work.
4. **Time-off:** remote companies prevent burnout. 'Wellness days' are regular breaks they enforce, often without prior warning they're about to occur. Most do 1 day every 2 months on top of regular holidays where a minimum number of days off are set & expected to be taken.
5. **Time-together:** being remote doesn't mean never being together physically. When remote teams come together it's with purpose which drives deeper connections and trust. The cadence for this varies across orgs & functions. The right cadence is typically 1-5 times per quarter.

6. **Communication:** who, when, why, what, & where to communicate is codified. You would never email a fire station if your house was on fire. Remote comms should be viewed the same way. Use different communication methods depending on the immediacy of response required.

7. **Transparency:** the best remote organizations I know operate from the POV that having more information is better than less. They open up everything for anyone to view, contribute to, or consume. This breeds a more collaborative approach and leads to more aligned teams.

8. **Performance:** output becomes the only measure of performance that matters. How long someone spends sat in a chair does not tell us anything about their quality of work. Remote companies are more scientific and granular in how they track progress and objectives.

9. **Meetings:** become less important and happen less frequently. When they do, they're for debate & decision making. All the work & exploration of the subject happens outside the meeting, enabling more diverse opinions, exploration of ideas, and better decisions.

10. **Equipment:** it's incredibly difficult to do great work if you don't have the right tools and equipment. The best remote companies kit out their teams with everything they need to do great work, guaranteeing they are as safe and comfortable remotely as they would be in an office.

11. **Hiring:** office-first companies hire the best person they can afford in a 30-mile radius of their physical location. Being remote lets companies hire the best person on the planet for every single role.

12. **Time-zones:** are the most divisive issue. Some swear by a +/- 3 hour range. Others believe it shouldn't matter. How async a company is decides what works.

13. **Diversity & Inclusiveness:** remote orgs should be far more diverse & inclusive because they're more accessible

- single parents
- caring for others
- health conditions or impairments

Remote work discriminates against nobody making it far easier for anyone to participate.

14. **Education:** continued learning and professional development is integral to success. The companies doing remote work successfully invest heavily in education. Most give funding to empower individuals to take control of their own progress.

15. **Community:** more than 'culture', the best remote companies are communities. They have rituals that are widely understood and respected



by the entire team. They encourage things like running clubs, or gaming nights but allow them to emerge organically.

16. **Workspace:** remote work does not mean work from home – it means work from anywhere. The best remote companies on the planet empower their teams to work wherever they are most productive and give them what they need to do it.

17. **Mental Health:** isolation and loneliness is a valid concern while working remotely. It requires individuals to be more purposeful about human connection and it's very important that this is encouraged and ensured.

18. **Self-care:** wellness, health, and happiness enable us all to do better and more meaningful work. The best remote companies heavily encourage clear boundaries and time away from work to enable this.

19. **Empathetic Leadership:** management and leadership remotely is very different. Rather than a command and control model, the best leaders in remote teams care passionately. The concept of servant leadership is something echoed widely in great remote organizations.

20. **The future.** Remote companies aren't the future because they enable 'the future of work'. Remote companies are the future because they enable 'the future of living'. Remote work is a quality of life upgrade for an entire generation.

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