



CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER  
JONATHAN DAHL

*Jonathan Dahl*

## Left at the Gate

There was the time at a corporate retreat when I spotted a colleague of mine from afar playing tennis with the CEO, and just knew at that moment he'd be destined for greatness (even though my forehand was better!). Another year, in Las Vegas, I remember watching the most spectacular fountain show from the window of my room at the Mirage—and realizing I was going to have to wing it the next morning when I spoke before a group of much smarter financial analysts. And I distinctly recollect a late-night post-conference gathering of an association of typesetters, a proud group of professionals who could enthrall you with tales of the Gutenberg Bible.

These events from my past all have one thing in common: each took place during a business trip. Remember those? Yes, there's lots of talk and concern about

**To my mind, there's a much greater loss going on, and I wonder if many corporate leaders realize it.**

whether workers should return to the office (RTO)—but what about returning to business travel (RTBT)? Businesspeople aren't businesspeople unless they're

flying to client meetings, attending corporate gatherings, and wandering through convention hallways, conference tags dangling from their necks. Is anyone doing that?

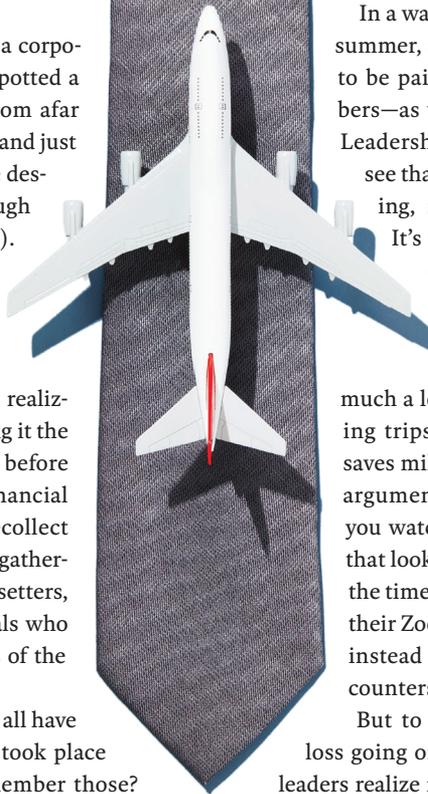
In a way. Leisure travel is roaring back this summer, and all those family vacations have to be paid for. But if you look at the numbers—as we did recently for “This Week in Leadership” on the Korn Ferry site—you'll see that while part of business travel is rising, much of it has been left at the gate.

It's behind what it was before the pandemic, and many great minds fear that it might take a long time to reach those levels again.

Which raises the question of how much a loss this all is. Undoubtedly, replacing trips to Vegas with virtual gatherings saves millions upon millions of dollars. The argument against travel only grows when you watch the frantic airport delays of late that look like the fall of Saigon. Just think of the time executives are saving as they adjust their Zoom volumes from their living rooms instead of joining snaking lines at airport counters.

But to my mind, there's a much greater loss going on, and I wonder if many corporate leaders realize it—but can't find a way to set RTBT into motion any better than they have RTO. Many friendships I made during business trips have lasted to this day, spawning creative conversations over the years that have enhanced my skill sets. Even those convention seminars and speeches—many of which I slept through—have left me with valuable lessons that continue to inform my everyday work.

Perhaps it's too old-school to talk about the values of in-person gatherings. Or maybe it's fair enough to simply say that a ton of innovations have come from spur-of-the-moment meetings of traveling strangers from different corners of the world. What I can report to you is the fate of that old tennis-playing colleague of mine: he's now the CEO of his own company. ▀



Additional copies: [briefings@kornferry.com](mailto:briefings@kornferry.com)  
Briefings / 1900 Avenue of the Stars, Suite 2800  
Los Angeles, CA 90067

Advertising: Kristen Walsh +1 (802) 563-5097  
Reprints: Terevy Stezhanowski +1 (310) 226-6336  
Circulation Customer Service: +1 (310) 596-8902



PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.  
Produced utilizing solar power in a sustainable and environmentally responsible manner.

Andrew...Rybalko/Getty Images

ISSN 1949-8385 © Copyright 2022, Korn Ferry