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As JPMorgan Chase enforces a 5-day RTO, staffers complain about too few desks, spotty Wi-Fi, and sneezing, sick coworkers

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Jamie Dimon is chairman and CEO Of JPMorgan Chase.

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It's the first week of JPMorgan Chase's return-to-office mandate that obliges thousands of people to come back in five days a week, and so far the adjustment has been less than smooth. Tensions are high among the bank's employees, who are grouching about noisy workplaces, sporadic Wi-Fi, and sick coworkers who cough and sneeze.

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One of the biggest problems facing [JPMorgan Chase](#) staffers, though, is the lack of desks. The nation's largest bank has a desk reservation system, but for some sites it doesn't work, or the policy is "first come, first serve," according to seven JPM employees who spoke to *Fortune*. This means that many employees, when they arrive at their workplace, will find all the desks filled, forcing them to hunt for a place to do their work. None of the workers, whose identities are known to *Fortune* and who are spread all over the U.S., wanted to speak on the record for fear of retaliation.

"There definitely aren't enough desks for everyone so people have to hope others are taking PTO that day to get a seat," said one JPM employee who works on the East Coast. This worker's team had to kick employees to another section after not getting enough desks, they said.



Jamie Dimon, JPMorgan Chase's chairman and CEO, has been a vocal proponent of RTO, claiming that working at the office helps boost teamwork, mentorship, and innovation. But the lack of desks makes it hard for some JPMorgan Chase groups to work together.

"We saw our seats were already occupied by others. We were forced to have to sit apart from one another," a second JPM staffer, also on the East Coast, said.

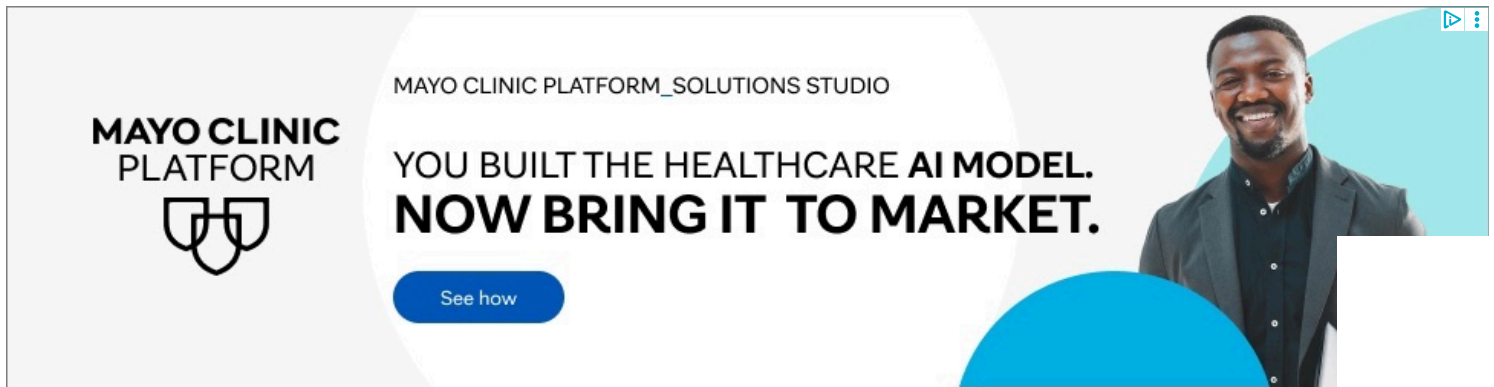
The lack of desks has forced many JPM employees to arrive at the workplace early, sometimes by as much as one hour, so they can snag a seat. Others have taken to placing personal items, according to the second source, while some employees in the San Francisco Bay Area are putting "paper tents" labeled with their team's name on desks to try to "unofficially reserve an area," a third person added. Sometimes these efforts don't work, and employees still must search for places to sit.

Dimon's five-day-a-week mandate was imposed in part to improve team spirit, but, ironically, it appears to have had the opposite effect in some cases.. Not getting a seat, or having a desk scooped up by other workers, has led to increased tension but so far no fights, people said. "You could just tell folks that got there later were feeling a bit off-kilter," a fourth employee in the South said.

"Coughing and sneezing all day"

In January, JPMorgan Chase set off a firestorm when the bank [informed](#) its [317,233](#) employees that all staff would be required to return to the office five days a week. Roughly 40% of JPMorgan Chase's employees had been working on a hybrid schedule, where they were in the office three days a week, since the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. Many bank employees went back full-time on March 3 while others are scheduled for RTO on March 10. But some sites, like JPMorgan Chase's [Polaris](#) regional headquarters in Ohio, which [houses](#) roughly 13,000 employees, were still listed Wednesday as "not yet determined."

Many workers are upset about the RTO. A group of JPMorgan Chase employees, who called themselves the "JPMC Workers," in February [launched](#) a publicly visible [petition](#) calling on Dimon to retain the hybrid-work model that the bank has used for years. But JPMorgan Chase's CEO has dismissed the employee movement, saying "I don't care how many people sign that f—ing petition," *Fortune* has [reported](#). JPMorgan Chase is also facing a unionization push among some workers.



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Bank employees [remain angry](#) about the RTO, but “the fear here is just as bad, so no one talks,” the second person said. Some employees expect the bank to adhere strictly to attendance policies, even for hybrid workers, and use the RTO mandate to fire people without paying severance. A JPMorgan Chase spokesman denied that the bank is using the office directive to manage attrition. “This is absolutely false,” said the spokesman, who referred *Fortune* to comments made by Jeremy Barnum, JPMorgan Chase’s CFO, in January during the bank’s fourth-quarter press conference call. JPMorgan is “very much not hoping for attrition as a function of return to the office,” Barnum said. The RTO is a “strategic decision for the company based on what we think is best for the long-term prospects of the company,” he added.

While some workers are describing the lack of desks as troublesome, other workers point to noise as the biggest issue with coming back to the office. Some employees said they work in an open office space without walls while others say they’re in cubicles. All agree that there’s lots of socializing, people talking on the phone, and, because meeting rooms are scarce, employees often holding [Zoom](#) calls at their desks. “People don’t know how loud they are on Zooms and, of course, if you have a dozen people Zooming then you’re going to hear all of that,” a third employee located in the Midwest said.



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Some workers have taken to wearing noise-cancelling earbuds or headphones in the office, they said.

Then there’s the Wi-Fi, which some bank employees described as sporadic or just not working. Earlier this week, a group of employees on the East Coast were unable to connect to Wi-Fi for several hours and were told to work from home until the technical issues were resolved, they said. “That was an entire day wasted,” the second employee said.

Some JPM staffers also complained about people coming to work sick. Many times, these workers don’t wear masks and risk spreading their illnesses to others. One employee said they sat next to someone who stayed in the office despite “coughing and sneezing all day long.”

“The office is loud, crowded, and overall not an enjoyable place to be,” an employee from the Midwest said.