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BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE

"IT MAY BE SURPRISING TO HEAR, BUT MANY ARE DECLINING LUCRATIVE OFFERS TO ENSURE LONG-TERM HAPPINESS IN THEIR ROLES AND TO SECURE A LEVEL OF AUTONOMY, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO WHERE AND HOW THEY WORK"

Argument for and against flexible working continues to ripple through Government, media and workplaces, with the constant debate on whether staff should be in the office or free to work from home and where the balances lie. One thing is certain, candidates are weighing up their options with an abundance of choice in a thriving recruitment market. But the big question is, who has the control - employers or employees? The truth really does depend on company culture and leadership style.

As this new era of work transitions, decisions regarding flexible working will of course be influenced by senior leadership teams, broadly reflecting company culture and leadership style, trickling down into every team-level decision. Of course, even today, leadership style runs on a spectrum, from autocratic to democratic… even surprisingly laissez-faire. We are seeing a pool of talented candidates expecting a level of autonomy in their roles and leadership styles affecting employment offers with their views on the topic. As part of the CIPD's *Flex from 1st Campaign*, they surveyed over 1,000 senior HR/decision makers and found that 57 percent were in favour of a day-one right to request flexible

working. The topic is clearly divisive and complex, but one thing is clear, we are seeing senior leadership candidates emerge from the past two years with a mindset that has changed and a desire for purpose and more joy in their working lives. It may be surprising to hear, but many are declining lucrative offers to ensure long-term happiness in their roles and to secure a level of autonomy, especially when it comes to where and how they work. This does not mean they are work-shy, as often denounced by more autocratic leaders in the press, they are simply fuelled by this sense of purpose and a reasonable amount of autonomy to fire their passions. Organisations could see this as an opportunity to boost performance but,

it really does depend on the views of the senior leadership teams in place. Here are some case studies based on these leadership styles.

Company A - Autocratic: This company's senior leadership team feels that facetime is essential in a retail and consumer-led environment. After the last two years of their head office team working from home, they feel facetime is essential to restore the buzz and creativity that has been lacking in recent times. While approximately half of the team are reluctant to return to the office, 9am-to-5pm, five days a week, other staff are ready and raring to go. The senior leadership team is therefore not willing to negotiate terms and have not engaged

with those reluctant to return, which has created some tension within the wider team. Unfortunately, they are already losing some staff and the unyielding company culture is putting off a significant proportion of talent from joining the company.

Company B - Democratic: This company has multi-million pound offices and a flexible working environment. In the past year or so, they have invested heavily in making their offices a great place to be. They are set up for collaboration and have communal spaces that encourage creativity and belonging. They have also worked on communication to ensure that organising these spaces and the people within them can be managed with ease and there is a strong infrastructure for staff to feel truly connected whether in the office or at home. The senior leadership team involved the workforce in every step of the decision-making process, through thorough and sensitive feedback and collaboration. Ultimately, employees are expected in the office for two days each week, but they have the autonomy to manage when, where and how. The force behind this culture of engagement, collaboration and purpose comes from a CEO who focuses on positive outcomes over outputs. This flows through the senior leadership team and the entire organisation.

Company C - laissez-faire: This company is at the other end of the spectrum. They have given their workforce the tools and complete freedom to work from wherever they choose, for as long as they choose and with no deduction in pay. This is an approach we have seen from Airbnb, whose co-founder and CEO, Brian Chesky, said: "We've designed a way for you to live and work anywhere, while collaborating in a highly-coordinated way and experiencing the in-person connection that makes Airbnb special." This includes the freedom to work overseas, organised in-person team gatherings and coordinated processes. The approach is ground-breaking and there are obvious concerns, including a rise in resentment among the workforce,

as some staff simply do not have the ability to enjoy that level of flexibility and freedom in their own lives. Whatever company-type, one thing is abundantly clear, staff want to feel a level of autonomy that companies would do well to accommodate for the acquisition and retention of talent. In the views of Companies B and C, autonomy is entirely manageable. By communicating clear expectations, having key performance indicators to measure performance and meeting regularly with staff, there is no need for micromanagement or daily facetime. That is where we see the importance of trust.

"THIS NEW WORLD OF WORK DOES NOT HAVE TO BE DIVISIVE, BUT COMPANIES WILL NEED TO LOOK AT THE CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP STYLES THAT FORM THE BASIS OF THEIR DECISIONS, USING WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED"

In a recent virtual panel discussion with LinkedIn, *Your way forward: Embrace change to create the future of work*, Crystal Gaskin, Chief People and Culture Officer at Mailchimp said: "Trust is engendered when there is clarity of expectations. When employees have the flexibility to do the work the way they need to." With measures and processes in place, it enables companies to give their workforce the desired level of autonomy. Equally important is 'belonging' which, of course, is essential to a thriving company culture and retention. Working from home does not support a level of community and collaboration that can be found in the office. However, in the same panel discussion, with senior leaders from Deloitte and Amplify, too, there was an agreement that this sense of belonging

comes from effective onboarding, a shared purpose and the support of colleagues. Through in-person team meetings, social events and clear communication, even Company C's approach underpins a culture of trust and belonging.

The argument for flexibility and autonomy is not going away. In fact, in the CIPD's Labour Market Outlook: Spring 2022, only 27 percent of respondents anticipated raising pay to address recruitment challenges in the next six months, but 38 percent will advertise more flexible jobs. Over the next few years, we will also hear more about Hybrid 2.0, another topic discussed by the LinkedIn panel. Hybrid 2.0 is essentially a more intentional look at where, when and how people come together in the workplace. At the beginning of the pandemic, companies simply ported organisational systems and processes to the home. Now, they will be looking at what they learned during that time. For example, ensuring that team and collaborative meetings have a clear purpose, stopping meetings that could have been emails and developing a sense of belonging that is supported with a strong company culture, rippling through the senior leadership into the entire organisation. Four-day weeks and Hybrid 2.0 are not mutually exclusive and the panel agreed that "It's really a buffet of things that are changing in this new world of work". This new world of work does not have to be divisive, but companies will need to look at the culture and leadership styles that form the basis of their decisions, using what we have learned in recent years. Put simply, if companies fail to adapt to an increased desire for flexibility and autonomy, they will struggle to attract and retain talent in an already competitive recruitment market. We all know that roles are hard to fill and there is a well-documented and looming skills shortage, so now is the time to develop an appealing and supportive workplace. The future is bright - we all just need to embrace it.

FOR FURTHER INFO
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