



## LET'S TALK: FLEXIBILITY



BY REBECCA THACKER / FEATURED, LET'S TALK BUSINESS / 12 MAR 2019



### How can more 'traditional' leaders see the value in flexible working?

Flexible working arrangements is not a new concept, yet why are so many 'traditional' leaders reluctant to embrace it?

Technological advances and cloud based software allows employees to work remotely from anywhere in the world and at a time that suits them, thus allowing employers to reward and retain valuable team members. According to an Employment survey, almost 40 per cent of employers said that flexible working arrangements was the best method of rewarding and retaining staff.

Presentation Studio CEO, Emma Bannister, said that flexible working reduced the financial impact of large office overheads, city-living salaries and complex IT networks.

"Reducing commute times, family friendly hours, even opening recruitment to remote regions, results in a happier, productive, and engaged team . . . Flexible working attracts and retains the best employees," she said.

While flexible working requires a high level of trust, it also offers greater autonomy and freedom, says Shippit co-founder and CEO, Rob Hango-Zada.

“It also supports them in establishing a healthier home/work divide . . . heightened employee morale, reduced absenteeism and employee turnover, as well as improved productivity and efficiencies...it’s hard for traditional leaders not to see the value in that,” he said.

In this weeks’ Let’s Talk we asked business leaders, *‘How can more ‘traditional’ leaders see the value in flexible working? Here are their thoughts on flexible working arrangements.*

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### **Nicola Scott – Senior Employment Relations Adviser, Employsure**

In the context of globalisation and changes in technology, leaders need to recognise that access to flexible working arrangements are no longer a competitive advantage; it’s essential to attract, retain and engage talent within a business. In an Employsure [survey](#) almost 40 per cent of employers told us that this is the best method of rewarding and retaining staff.

Although offering employees flexibility may be perceived by traditional leaders as adding unwanted complexity to running a business, the benefits outweigh the costs. Flexibility creates opportunities to meet changing customer expectations, enhance its service offerings across time and place, and increase access to new markets. It also leads to higher productivity outcomes within the workplace due to enhanced morale and engagement amongst employees.

With a wide range of flexible working options available such as flexi hours, job sharing, remote work and more, traditional leaders can consider a variety of options to create a balancing act, which meets both business and employee’s needs.

### **Sandrina Postorino, Committee Member, Sydney Angels**

Flexible work models offer benefits to employees and employers and are now easier to implement than ever thanks to a range of new technologies available.

The reasons for people seeking flexible work arrangements could be having children or pursuing studies to upskill. Housing unaffordability in our cities is also leading to longer commutes, which can be mitigated by not having to travel during peak hours.

From the employer's perspective, there is overwhelming evidence that happy employees are, on balance, more productive over time. They take fewer sick days and are less likely to quit, which will save the business significant costs. There are also other benefits, for example extended customer service hours for B2C businesses, or the ability to roster employees as required in businesses with seasonal fluctuations.

The growth of flexible work models has been supported by a number of emerging technologies. Video conferencing is now accessible to anyone through Fuze or Skype. Slack helps virtual teams collaborate on projects, whilst Trello and Jira are examples of online project management tools. Even the water cooler chat can be replaced by zoom.us!

**Rob Hango-Zada, co-founder and CEO, Shippit**

While it can be challenging for more 'traditional' leaders to embrace flexible working, they are slowly coming around to the reality that it is no longer a 'nice to have' but an essential part of attracting, retaining and engaging employees.

In saying this, while collaborative technologies now enable employees to work from essentially anywhere, it is important that leaders strike a good balance between face-to-face contact and work from home days.

This home/office combination is key for employees and business leaders to reap the benefits of working flexibly, because as it exhibits a high degree of trust in employees and grants them greater autonomy and freedom, it also supports them in establishing a healthier home/work divide.

By better aligning individual interests and company interests, the flow on effect for employers includes heightened employee morale, reduced absenteeism and employee turnover, as well as improved productivity and efficiencies...it's hard for traditional leaders not to see the value in that.

**Emma Bannister, CEO, Presentation Studio**

In the past 12 years of running my business I have witnessed a massive shift in how my team balance their work /lifestyle. And we are not unique. With cloud-based tools transforming the way we collaborate, as well as devices that allow greater flexibility, I have seen growth in the number of clients and their workforces, adopting more agile ways of working. Yes, trust in your team is required, however I can testify that any pay-off is more than worth it. Reducing commute times, family friendly hours, even opening recruitment to remote regions, results in a happier, productive, and engaged team. Equally, flexible working, reduces the financial impact of large office overheads, city-living salaries and complex IT networks. Flexible working attracts and retains the best employees.

**Rolf Howard, Managing Partner, Owen Hodge Lawyers**

As industries and technologies are changing, so must workplaces. Studies have shown that offering employees flexibility in areas such as start time, finish time and working from home arrangements can boost productivity, reduce stress and help foster employee loyalty.

It is important that traditional workplace leaders realise that the standard nine to five is no longer the most viable employment method. Implementing a flexible workplace can come with challenges, such as arranging meetings (either onsite or via conference calls) and ensuring that employees are meeting their performance quotas.

However, the benefits far outweigh these challenges. Offering staff the option of a flexible workplace comes with advantages like attracting and retaining talented employees and boosting employee morale.

In the legal industry, solicitors can feel restricted by mandatory court attendances and mediation meetings. Offering a flexible workplace to counter that ensures our employees don't burn out – a common experience for lawyers.

**Karen Gately, founder, Corporate Dojo**

Leaders are wise to recognise the link between the depth of engagement people feel and the standard of contribution they make. When trust and respect in the employment relationship is strong people are entirely more likely to want to do the right thing and dig deep to give their all. Adopting a flexible approach that allows people to balance work and life demands, can go a long way toward building the strength of relationships and depth of engagement needed for an organisation to truly thrive.

**Shahid Nizami, Managing Director, HubSpot**

Having worked at progressive companies like HubSpot and Google for the past five years, I've seen first-hand the various benefits of offering a flexible working environment in comparison to the more traditional environments I experienced earlier in my career.

The truth is, the way people work and live has changed — people want to build their work around their lives, not the other way around. A flexible work schedule allows employees a level of autonomy to create their own schedules and find a work-life blend that works for them.

Many organisations are realising that if you trust your employees, they'll reward your trust. Treating your team like adults, and letting them be responsible for managing their own time, is one of the best ways to motivate them and inspire them to do their best work. In my opinion, organisations that take this approach will attract and retain the best talent.

**John Tabari, Co-Founder, ClassBento**

In my experience, keeping staff working at rigid nine-to-five hours will create higher turnover rates and lower work output. This rigidity limits you right from the recruitment process – without flexible working opportunities your talent pool immediately excludes highly efficient young mums or dads who are in prime experience and need that flexibility, and, switched-on millennials who expect it.

High growth companies get the best out of their employees with the knowledge that people work best at different times. As the co-founder of high growth start up ClassBento, and dad to a two-year old, for me that means family time between 7am-8.30am, and again in the early evening. My work hours slot in early in the morning, during the day, and continue after 9pm when my little one is asleep.

**Ceri Ittensohn, Chief People & Culture Officer, TAL**

For leaders to achieve their goals, they need the right people in their teams, focussed on the right things. For the best talent to choose to join, choose to stay and choose to give their best to a company, providing a working environment that suits their life and the nature of their role is as important as providing meaningful work. Providing employees with options to help manage their life and their role can be hugely beneficial to both employees and employers.

At TAL, we understand that flexible working is important to our people, so we provide an 'all roles flex' approach to work that is inclusive of all our people and offers the opportunity to benefit from remote working, part-time work, flexible hours, job share, and compressed working weeks. We recognise that our people are more innovative and more productive when they are given the flexibility to achieve both work and personal commitments, as it enables them to maintain their wellbeing. We also understand that what works for an employee one year, may change the next, depending on different stages of life. In other words, sometimes it's about being flexible within flexible arrangements.

**Scott Cooper, VP Marketing, GO1**

Adapting to flexible working can be tough for those who have not experienced it before, and a big first step that needs to be taken is trusting your employees to do the job that they were hired to do. Are you hiring people to follow your every instruction throughout the day? Or are they there to perform the role for which they were hired? If it's the latter, and you don't think that you can trust them to do the job without you watching over their shoulder, a bigger question needs to be asked: should you have even hired them in the first place? Or is the problem on your side and maybe you need to let go of trying to micro manage everything? Flexible working is all about communication, structure and process in the way that you work. As long as all parties are clear on what and how they need to deliver – and communicate clearly with their team – they are setting themselves up for success.

**Victoria Stuart, Co-Founder and Co-CEO, Beam Australia**

The truth is, they won't have a choice. Flexibility is no longer a nice to have – it's a business imperative.

Research has demonstrated that a successful shift to genuine flexible working, which supports initiatives such as reduced hours or remote working, results in greater productivity, loyalty, retention, engagement, and employee health – both physical and psychological. This ultimately results in a more inclusive and diverse workforce that has been proven to deliver business benefits over and above great talent and greater shareholder returns.

Also, important to note, within six years millennials are set to represent 75% of the workforce and their top factor in job choice is work-life balance. With 30% of millennials having a side hustle outside their normal job, flexibility is high on their work wish list.

Additionally, many leaders wanting to increase the number of women in leadership, without genuine flexibility, will struggle to shift these numbers.

There are also other segments of our workforce who require reduced hours per week or fractional work to support their lives outside of work which include part-time professionals such as athletes, pre-retirees, parents and carers. Therefore, in a world of talent and skills shortages, excluding these segments is high risk. In order to attract and retain the best talent, business leaders must adapt to changing talent needs and preferences to compete in the war on talent.

**Ren Butler, Team & Community Lead, Inspire9 Coworking Space**

Traditional market leaders can get immense value out of offering flexibility to their staff. Aside from saving on office overheads, encouraging your staff to surround themselves with a variety of professional talent and backgrounds is shown to spark better dynamic problem solving and social accountability. The traditional workforce is quickly moving towards more cognitively challenging roles away from repetitive tasks thanks to automation and technology. This puts immense pressure on staff to rapidly upskill and be prepared for a faster pace of change in their teams and roles. Often pausing work for an extended period of time to do a formal training isn't feasible. By embedding talent in their local collaborative business community such as Inspire9 they can learn from others and be exposed to the types of critical thinking needed to rise to their new challenges. Social accountability of shared workspaces is also shown to be a powerful benefit. Many of our members tell us they look forward to coming in and seeing their 'work mates' on days when their intrinsic motivation is low.