

mindset
WITH RACHEL SETTI

HIGH TIME FOR HYBRID WORKING

As we launch into 2022, we are facing a work revolution: an exciting opportunity to reset old and outdated ways of working, and create lasting career, geographical and societal transformations which will serve generations to come, writes **RACHEL SETTI**.

As we settle into a “living with COVID” world there is no doubt we are charged with creating effective hybrid working structures. It is incumbent on us to carve out the benefits of the previous 9-5 office job and marry them with learning gleaned from remote working practices over the past two years.

The data is compelling. A 2021 global PwC survey uncovered only nine per cent of employees wish to return to a full-time office environment, and 72 per cent would like a hybrid working arrangement. So how do we create a new culture which maximises our lockdown learning from a wellbeing and productivity perspective?

Before the pandemic, managers grappled with concerns relating to productivity in the work-from-home arena. Often, remote working requests were considered the domain of the disengaged or avoidant employee. This concern has been largely

unfounded and superseded by the issue of burnout relating to employees’ struggle to switch off at the end of the working day. It turns out remote or hybrid working requires resilience as it introduces a cluster of risk factors, some of which were previously unconsidered.

One risk-factor is timing. Many people experience remote working schedules to be unrelenting, providing little time for breaks or recovery. The notion of time-poor lawyers is not a new phenomenon, though the issue seems to have been exacerbated because activities which once doubled up as “down-time” no longer exist. This includes travel between meetings, expedient coffee catch-ups, ad-hoc water cooler interactions and the like. As such, to make a success of remote and hybrid working we need to closely consider the interplay between work and home. From an individual perspective it is about creating a synergy

between personal and work commitments. For instance, consider your energy levels. Many people feel energised at the beginning of the week and this subsides as the week progresses, but for others it may be a reversed trend. With this in mind, structure your professional and personal tasks accordingly. Decide what to tackle earlier rather than later in the week and integrate this with your office and remote arrangements. Furthermore, most people feel more cognitively alert in the morning and would be well advised to use that time to dive into complex, problem saturated cases. Later in the day may be better for dealing with emails, client calls, and procedural activities which are typically less cognitively taxing. Monitoring your own energy levels will give you clues as to how to proceed.

Organisational risk-factors vary, though poor job design commonly leads the charge when it comes to burnout



and reduced mental health, particularly when the role presents high, unrelenting demands with limited influence over significant job factors. These issues can often go unnoticed in the hybrid working environment. For example, a crowded schedule with restricted opportunity for delegating or re-distributing work creates a situation whereby the individual lacks the agency to flex, mould and influence their routine to create synergies between work objectives and personal needs. A trusting work culture which encourages employee empowerment, autonomy and accountability is the starting point towards addressing this.

A further risk factor which can often go unnoticed is the power of employee recognition and reward. It has been shown employees who feel unrecognised for their efforts are twice as likely to report reduced mental wellbeing. Reward can come in many forms and is best when tailored to the individual. For instance, regular one-on-one check-ins with your team and colleagues can support wellbeing, productivity and reduced absenteeism. Open, transparent and regular communication is highly relevant in remote working arrangements, as the opportunity for face-to-face interactions is significantly lower than in the office environment.

As we begin to crystallise hybrid work practices, firms that best manage the nexus between work and home are likely to emerge as employers of choice in the hybrid landscape. Best practice strategies ideally meet the needs of the firm whilst providing employee flexibility by blending the pros and cons of office and remote working.

As we grapple with hybrid trial-and-error, each firm is charged with working within its specific parameters to best combine on-site opportunities for collaboration, creativity, and knowledge sharing, with positive remote working experiences such as healthy lifestyle habits, regular exercise, self-care, and family time. Open, trusting, multi-level discussions will serve well in landing on the most effective balance. **LSJ**

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WITH ANNA HINDER

I've been asked to take on a new leadership role. It's a role that a number of people have held over the years and no one seems to have been able to make it work. Do you have any tips to increase my chances of success?

Every now and again there is a role that a person really makes their own. Their success becomes linked to the way a role is performed and it can make it hard for the people that follow. Stuart Sidle calls these roles "haunted" in his review of research into the downside of leaving a legacy. The "ghost" in this case is the expectations that linger about the way the role must be done. Inheriting a legacy is one thing, finding a ghost is quite another. Here are some tips to ritually cleanse your role and set yourself up for success.

Start by learning as much as you can about the creation of the role, the person who made it their own, and the others who have lived in the haunted house before you. Look for key attributes or important decisions that were made at a critical point. These provide a pathway to success or a situation to discuss with your stakeholders. Give particular focus to the context and circumstances the firm or organisation found themselves in. The first GC may well have made a heroic contribution that is not appropriate for today's challenges or the first COO of a firm was part of decisions on a size and scale that isn't needed today.

Make friends with the ghost by acknowledging their contribution and finding one or two characteristics that align with your leadership style. Next, add a tweak or a change on the past to indicate how your approach will be both respectful of the past and future focused. The goal is to position yourself as similar in some ways and different in others. Those who knew the past leaders will have long and strong memories of their contribution - and the people before you who didn't befriend the ghost.

Get ready to be scared by those who were successful in bringing down others who followed the original person. If a set of tactics has worked in the past, there may be a temptation to use them again. Internal politics, factions, back stabbing and undermining are just some of the scare tactics. Be ready for them and see them for what they are - expressions of loyalty to the past and the actions of people who feel threatened. This is a good time to draw on your own sponsors, the reasons why you took on the role, and the legacy you would like to leave.

A final word of caution. As your time in the role comes to an end, remember these challenges and set your successor up for success - don't leave a ghost of your own. Bringing up a successor who flourishes is the best legacy.

Happy Holidays to you and yours. It's been a pleasure contributing this column for *LSJ* in 2021. *Regards, Anna*



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