

OVERCOMING RELUCTANCE TO RETURN TO THE OFFICE

NINE LIVES CONSULTING 

Career Navigator



Maybe it's not just about pyjamas and trains....

As the official restrictions are eased and employers and CBD businesses seek to encourage more people to return to their central offices, they are bemused by the lack of enthusiasm amongst a large proportion of the employees to do so.

Why?

The popular view is that people have happily adopted the casual dress, minimal travel, more flexibility on working hours and better balance of life but there may be other factors underlying these obvious benefits.

Over the last 20 years of providing outplacement to a wide variety of organisations; Government, not for profits, private and public entities, we have observed a number of trends;

- The workplace has become a more stressful environment each year due to a variety of reasons.
- Fewer staff who are retrenched are expressing sadness at leaving the employer.
- Many more people are expressing significant relief on being retrenched.
- A greater proportion of employees claim to feel trapped and wish they could find another role.
- A growing interest in being self-employed or a contractor.
- Typically, within six months, many have a new role with a better fit and are happier than before.

The pandemic has irrevocably changed the perception of the role of the workplace.

- The remote system is real.
- The work from home model works.
- Staff have accepted and adopted the new ways.
- Productivity in general has not suffered and in most cases has lifted.
- Clients have adapted and adopted the remote process.
- Suppliers have adopted working from home.
- Working from home is established to varying degrees, according to practicality, across the whole Australian economy.

So, why, when it is safe to return to the office and all its enticements, is there such resistance? Perhaps, work-from-home is now alleviating office tyranny?

What are some remedies?

For the employer; Management needs to identify:

- Which tasks are best performed remotely and which task are best performed in the central office?
- Productive and supportive software tools for all tasks. Not surveillance systems.
- Realistic workflows and timelines and deadlines.
- Performance standards and monitoring processes appropriate for the new paradigm. Monitor output not hours.
- Assessment and mentoring processes to ensure career progression.
- Communication protocols that equally accommodate remote and in-house communications.
- Processes to ensure teams and managers stay connected.
- Processes to enable building new relationships.
- A thorough understanding of each role and a comprehensive approach to selecting the most appropriate employee.
- **Supervisory and management styles that do not rely on power, threat, intimidation, micro-managing, hypocrisy and cant but focus on common goals and respect for each individual and their capabilities.**

For the employee; Each employee is responsible for knowing who they are, what they offer and why they want a role.

If we are clear on these issues, we can select roles and work environments that suit us; our particular skills, interests and attributes.

This means we need clarity about:

- Our values: must match those demonstrated by the dominant party, (employer organisation, partners or clients). Without this match, one cannot maintain commitment and your best endeavours.
- The role.
 - Our track record indicates whether we can perform the role.
 - Our career stage and aspirations dictate the personal purpose of the role.
 - Our personality dictates the style and key focus of the role
- Our fit with the team; our personality and style cannot change significantly; we need to know what we need in our environment so that we can thrive. By knowing what we need, we can ensure we accept roles that suit us and hence we will be successful. For example, if you like working in an environment that has few surprises, then don't join an organisation that is poorly organised. If you like to work with a boss who respects you, don't get involved with a micro manager style of supervisor.

All three aspects must be aligned to our needs for us to thrive:

With this knowledge, the employer and employee can conduct a sensible conversation on identifying the most suitable role and where, when, and what and will be done by this role.

There will be a proportion of employers who will balk at accepting these ideas, but they do so at their peril.

We are seeing, in recent times, that good quality employees are taking more responsibility for their employment conditions and are very clear about what they will and will not accept in terms of;

- Tasks
- Management style and attitudes
- Performance measurement
- Autonomy
- Work-from-home proportion of the week
- Flexibility of hours worked in each mode
- Hours available each week
- Location
- Travel to workplace

By being reasonable but clear and firm, they are achieving conditions that better suit them.

Those employers who do not accommodate these concerns will find they will only attract the desperate and less suitable applicants and their high-quality staff will move elsewhere.

To date, organisations are observing the working from home benefits include;

- Reduced stress in family vs work commitments
- Improved productivity and focus on getting things done
- Greater flexibility and choice of applicants for a role (not constrained by geography)
- Easier to enhance the diversity of the workforce
- Improvement in well-being of staff
- More opportunities for business

The genie is out of the bottle, get with it.

