

The office as a destination

2 years ago



Jackie Furey discusses how to attract staff back to the office by creating a dynamic and agile destination where teams can enjoy the spark and energy of being around colleagues and peers.

The world of work is a very different place in 2023, however many people are still talking about finding their way back to “normality”! Some people may not have realised, but we are already well and truly back living and breathing the “new normal”.

Hybrid working is here to stay. We’ve proven to ourselves that the two-hour commute benefits no one, other than the transport companies of course! However, it is important that we find the right balance. While there is a lot to be said for having the flexibility to put the washing machine on between Teams meetings, popping that casserole in the slow cooker at lunchtime and juggling childcare commitments whilst you can adorn your new working from home comfy wardrobe.

But for all the things we have gained, what have we lost?

I don’t believe you can ever underestimate the value of the human interaction and the benefits you get from those face-to-face meetings. Did you know we have 43 muscles in our face? All of these play a part in what you are thinking and feeling when sitting in a face-to-face meeting, but sadly these body language flags are easily lost across our 16” monitors via, Teams, Zoom, Skype and alike. You can easily miss important body language signals when meeting digitally that may have changed the direction the meeting if you’d seen these in person.

There are so many benefits that come with being present in the office. When catching up with your colleagues, and chatting about your weekend, or the match you watched, gives us that feel good drug oxytocin which is directly connected to trust. The more we can engage with our colleagues and learn about their lives, share a joke or a catch up over a coffee, the more you build a trusted relationship.

This is often the lifeblood of many businesses, and those relationships will spark conversation and innovation throughout your company, that you just won't get from working at your kitchen table or home office.

So how do companies entice staff back to the office? Well, you must give them something that they just can't get at home.

For the young and ambitious in your company, they may need to be present in the office to feel they are being seen by their peers and managers. How are they ever going to learn and progress through their careers if there's no one to say "hey look at me, I'm brilliant, and hungry for success and recognition" – so please as managers give them that time.

That is often an easy win, however, the more established members of staff may need much more encouragement, as a lot of them are by now self-starters. They know their job inside out and feel they really have nothing to gain from being in the office. These are the group you really need to concentrate your efforts on.

It can't be all around free food and barista coffee, but it's a start, and it's about tapping into what is important to them as individuals and as a team.

We live in an age where "bring your own device" (BYOD) to work is commonplace. A lot of us have taken great pride in creating our home office during the pandemic and have purchased IT equipment, printers' and furniture that is probably more superior to what is used in many offices. So how do you better that as an employer?

Well, the answer is you don't, you just replicate it instead!

Make your workplace inviting, collaborative, bright and welcoming. Create spaces where it is easy to meet up and "chew the cud". Put those comfy sofas in that you never want to get out of, create a think tank space when you can take your discussions to another level. Make it a place to spark in.

The office is no longer about "work per say", it's not the place to go to do battle with your email inbox or to get that report written, that is very much still best done from home.

So, I am not advocating we all rush back to the office full time, but in fact I believe we need to find a balance. I would suggest a minimum of two or three days a week to be healthy balance of time spent in the office. However, it still very much remains a personal thing, some people will need more, and others can't give more. But the most important thing is to aim to be present at least once a week, show up, catch up, reconnect, feel part of something and get excited. Your staff and your business will benefit from this for one or more days in the office massively.