

NIGEL WRIGHT REVEALS ITS RESPONSE TO **CHANGING** **ATTITUDES TO WORK**

“Organisations that refuse to adapt their tools, invest in the acquisition as well as training and development of skills, and completely rethink their environment, risk being left behind.”



Sounds like pretty sound advice, who offered it? Oh... we did. In 2017. Published on September 20th in an article titled 'Work is changing: what does it mean for talent attraction and management?' we urged companies to align their talent acquisition and retention strategies to the modern world - acknowledging the changing

nature of work, as well as the pressures of modern life and how they impact the wants and needs of today's talent.

The piece is indicative of literature still 'doing the rounds' in the world of HR and management consultancy and, as any article purporting expertise, it made Nigel Wright itself appear 'on the ball' in this area. But were we? Maybe.

We were certainly trying - that's for sure - though, at the time, it was more a case of 'Do as We Say, Not as We Do.' 18 months on, however, things have changed and we're now able to reveal solutions that have worked for us. First, a recap of the social and work-related factors driving companies to re-imagine their approach to culture, training and talent management.

Insecurities have been paramount during the last ten years. As the world still recovers from the recession, other endless socio-economic, geopolitical, demographic and environmental upheavals and events, underpinned by rapid technological advancement, still exasperate individual anxieties. Even now, during an apparent growth spurt for the world economy, as extreme poverty continues to fall and North America and much of Western Europe enjoy record rates of employment, some find that a sense of uncertainty pervades our social and working lives.

A recent World Mental Health Day was a timely reminder that although many people may appear to be thriving, they're in fact barely making it through the day. In the UK, for example, annual prescriptions for mental health related drugs have doubled during the last 10

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years. While the factors listed above are likely to be part of the problem, it's also not uncommon for people to refer to everyday life as being too frantic — amplified perhaps by a perceived need to feel constantly connected via email, phone, social media, etc. Over stimulation, psychologists say, leads to mental fogginess and prevents us from being our best.

Amidst this environment, however, a backlash is taking place. Historically fixed attributes of work (hours, location, contracts) are being challenged as people try to claw back, if anything, the required head space to cope with contemporary life as described. Working hours have been in decline across Europe for years and a recent report by PwC highlighted growing demands from workers to be released from the 'constraints' on 9-5 employment. Similarly, research by Dell has revealed how remote or home working is on the rise, while a move towards specialist and portfolio freelance work is dismantling traditional career paths and removing people from the talent pool.

These changes also coincide with a new breed of employee — the millennial. This 'Google generation' want instant access to a better career and they want it all too: A salary with perks, constant reassurance and praise, stability as well as flexibility, and a job and working life that gives them purpose. Recent research from Gallup confirms, however, that millennials are in fact the driving force of workplace changes, leading the charge across organisations by demanding the things it turns out everyone, regardless of their age, desires.

Working life isn't what it used to be and working life will continue to evolve. The challenges outlined above are faced by all companies and with talent



being hard to find, especially with high employment, surely people investment is more important than ever before?

It is well documented how modern organisations are adapting to the new world of work by creating 'enriching environments' in an effort to make their talent want to stay. While factors like attractive remuneration and benefits packages remain important, initiatives that support personal growth, health and well-being and workplace culture, for example, that encourage genuine feelings of respect and dignity among staff, are becoming more important. Embedding company values and aligning organisations with

perceived 'positive impact' causes, such as those linked to charitable or environmental affairs, also helps to boost beneficial reciprocity through tying people into a larger common purpose.

There is acknowledgement, however, that not all businesses are the same, and different approaches are needed in different contexts. That is exactly the attitude Nigel Wright took when seeking to embrace change, using an approach of genuine engagement, rather than cautious distrust. Starting with informal group discussions with millennial employees, we began to conceive solutions that worked for us, rather than following what other companies were doing. These conversations were then backed

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up with data from a formal annual employee survey giving us a broader insight of the needs and wants of our whole organisation.

Learning and development was the most popular request from millennials as well as from people at all levels in our employee survey. Furthermore, and perhaps unsurprisingly, our people generally wanted more money and more time off.

Starting with training, we wanted to recognise our internal strengths and utilise them in coaching, rather than outsourcing the problem. Now, all new starters at Nigel Wright receive 100 hours of formal training and development from managers and

directors in their first six months. This is supplemented by on-the-job mentoring and coaching. Furthermore, all new managers across the group attend sessions at our UK HQ – the centre of excellence for employee training and development at Nigel Wright – and senior employees from the business visit other offices to deliver training to the UK and international teams.

Yes, money and other perks are important but they need to be associated with the right behaviours.

At Nigel Wright, hard work, good service and achieving results get rewarded. All our consultants enjoy uncapped bonuses based on effective efforts to win work and deliver it. Other perks are on offer too including our high flyers scheme – where each quarter a group of ‘Top Billers’ take a day off to enjoy a paid-for trip to a city where one of our 13 offices is located.

Finally, in addressing the requests for more flexibility and time off we decided to broaden permission for informal working arrangements. All employees are now able to work from home and leave early or start later, to fit with personal commitments. Other formal flexible working patterns exist too. With regards to time off, an extra day off per year is now offered for every year’s service completed, up to five years. Employees can also ‘cash in’ any additional holidays above 25 days if they wish. For those loyal employees who complete five years’ service, they can enjoy a paid month-long sabbatical, to use in addition to their 30 day allowance, and do something they couldn’t otherwise do while working a full-time job. This benefit is repeated again for all subsequent five year anniversaries.

The 2013 Trust Barometer report, published by global PR firm Edelman, confirmed that public trust in the opinions of employees far outweighs that of a company’s PR department, CEO, or Founder. A combination of understanding the changing nature of work and the pressures of modern day life, together with listening to our employees and acting to satisfy their wants and needs – within a context that matches our ambitions and vision as a business – ensures that Nigel Wright staff tell great stories about their time here and encourage others to consider a rewarding career with us too.

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