Home or away?

Hands up if you feel like you are living in a Steven Spielberg movie! I for one, never thought that a year later, I would still be answering the front door to Amazon and Majestic drivers instead of trekking into the City each day or even just queuing for my lunch at a local sandwich shop!

The media is quick to say that people are missing the social aspects of being in the office and some are almost desperate to return to that little piece of normality. Others we know, are enjoying the change and almost dread the thought of standing on a cold train platform, laden down with work bags, a coffee in hand and negotiating the office turnstile with all their belongings.

We must not forget COVID-19 has had a massive impact on everyone, and its more than just getting people back in the office that will ensure we are on the road to recovery.

We advise clients to remember that some staff will be feeling anxious about lockdown easing and coming in to contact with so many people outside their household/social circles again. Do we fist-bump or elbow-bump "hello"? Do we shake hands? How close do we stand to colleagues? Is it safe to stand in the lift together? All the things we took for granted before the pandemic.

The guidance I am giving to my clients, is consistent on this: Do you trust your staff to work from home in the long-term? Is it essential they are office-based and why? Some will give an upbeat valiant response to both questions, while others are a bit more hesitant to reply. I remind clients that trust is critical; the past year has offered plenty of opportunity to manage performance of staff working remotely.

Now is a good time to start looking at your workplace policies. Take a slow and measured approach to how you get people back in to attend work. Communication and consultation is the key here. I don't mean just look at your 'flexible working policy' (which more commonly is used for staff who want to alter their hours/work patterns) but look at what "remote working policy" you can put in place to accommodate staff not being office based. We have written "The 3:2 office" policy for clients. The policy gives staff and leaders greater parameters of remote working with appropriate clauses and guidelines on how to make it effective for both parties.

If you worry as a leader that by having a new remote working policy will mean you are inundated with requests, then your crystal ball is amazing! An employer must remember that employees are eligible to make formal flexible working requests. How you handle the response is key and it must be dealt with in a 'reasonable' way.

If the employee is able to prove that the quality of their work performance has not been negatively impacted by working from home during the pandemic, then it would seem harsh not to permit it.

If you want help to create a remote working policy to accommodate pandemic issues, please get in touch. Email kwatkins@ihrsolutions.co.uk or call me direct on 07566 766954 or call our helpline on 01604 709509.

Connect with me on LinkedIn or visit our website.

About the Author

KATHERINE WATKINS

Katherine has over 20 years' international experience working in HR, across various sectors, including financial services, insurance and regulated environments. Over the years, she has collaborated with some exceptionally talented HR professionals, with whom she has joined forces on special projects. Her network of HR professionals provides advice and training to companies and other HR teams.

In her role with UKGI Group, Katherine heads up the Human Resources Consultancy and provides objective support to firms on employment law and HR issues. She uses her extensive skills and knowledge to work with firms to help them develop strong and resilient HR strategies and establish healthy organisational cultures.

Katherine holds a degree in Business Administration and Management from the University of Northampton and a Postgraduate Diploma in Human Resource Strategies from London Metropolitan University. She is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (FCIPD).