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From recruitment to retirement – high performance from the multigenerational workforce

Conference report

It was a very full house for Working Families' annual conference, hosted by law firm DWF at the 'Walkie Talkie' building. After delegates had enjoyed the amazing views over London, they were welcomed by Hilary Ross, Executive Partner at DWF, who talked about DWF's understanding of the link between performance and work-life balance. She then introduced Katja Hall, Deputy Director-General of the CBI.

Katja emphasised that only by building a flexibility that works for all can we both retain the strengths of the UK on job creation and economic performance and support our workforce throughout their working life. She said that organisations who did not engage with employees in finding flexible solutions ran the risk of becoming uncompetitive. According to the CBI's Employment Trends survey 8 in 10 companies already offer flexible working but when it comes to implementation old attitudes still die hard with over half of businesses citing changing mind set as their biggest obstacle of implementation. Katja acknowledged that the Government have a role in helping employers and working parents calling for maternity pay to be extended from 39 weeks to 52 and free childcare to be made available for one and two year olds. She concluded by saying that whilst progress had been made there was still much to do.

Next to speak was Carol Rosati, of Harvey Nash who spoke about the changing world of recruitment. She argued that their recruiters need to talk to employers differently about jobs, and to question whether there is an opportunity to take a bolder approach to job design. Does it really have to be done the same way? Carol talked about the diversity triangle in recruitment, where recruiters need to have different conversations with employers about overhauling job specs, clients need to work on developing a level recruitment playing field, and women need to communicate more effectively at recruitment about their flexible needs.

Sarah Jackson of Working Families then took delegates through the 'Happy to Talk' strapline, a simple way of flagging up an employer's willingness to discuss flexible working right from the outset at interview stage. Not only is it a powerful recruitment tool, observed Sarah, but it is also a way of building flexibility into careers right from the outset.

Angela Cooke, Diversity and Wellbeing Manager at PWC then spoke about their approach. As one of the 'big four', they are very interested in attracting the top talent to work for them. This means understanding what potential hires want when they are looking at employers. What PWC have found is that millennials have a high expectation of being able to have a good work-life balance, and they anticipate working in new ways as technology develops. PWC have presented flexible working as an option for all employees, supplemented by case studies. Angela noted that within the firm they are already using the 'Happy to Talk' strapline for the recruitment activities. Flexibility isn't just about formal flex though, said Angela. A great deal of informal flexibility went on too, and this was a positive for the overall organisational culture.

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The varied breakout sessions gave delegates an opportunity to hear from one of our experts and/or learn from their peers with case studies from some of the UK's leading employers in this field.

Can this job be done flexibly? Getting the most from your recruitment specialist

Speaker: Karen Mattison MBE, Director, **Timewise**

- There is no government data on flexible working, however nearly 9m (8.7) people work part time - there are lots of people working flexibly in the UK who go under the radar.
- Of those part-timers, 650,000 are in the higher tax bracket.
- There is very little information on where or which areas/sectors part timers work in – however Karen's view is that it is largely across all sectors.
- Flexibility is viewed as part of an employee's benefits package – not the job design by the employer.
- All jobs need to be viewed by the output first and how you deliver it second.
- Recruiters can open employers up to the possibility of making a role flexible with questions like: 'for the dream candidate, are you open to flexible working?'
- Recruitment to flexible roles is a 2-way conversation with the employer and also candidates.
- The most frequently asked question flexible working candidates ask is 'When should I ask about flexible working?'

Issues for recruiters

- Those in recruitment need to hit KPIs and targets – the more full-time roles they can place, the greater their income, so the industry is generally less open to placing part-time roles.
- It is fishing from a smaller pond if those who want to work flexibly are effectively excluded.
- One way of overcoming this is when there are no suitable full-time candidates, to offer outstanding flexible-working or part-time candidates instead.
- The good news is that this is an emerging market and those who use it positively now, can make real gains for the future.

D&I business case for default flexibility

Speaker: Simon Langley, UK Head of Inclusion & Diversity, National Grid

Simon discussed how National Grid have gone about building the business case for flexible working, which in his case is very much the same as for D&I, and the value of recruiting flexible roles from day one, particularly in some of their more traditional work areas and roles such as Field Engineering. Attendees learnt how 'flexible retirement' was helping National Grid deal with an aging work force and ensure that new apprentices learnt from their more experienced colleagues. There was also much discussion on how to build a business case for supporting staff working to billable hours with flexible working and how challenging this could be.

Engaging & Training Managers

Speakers: Liz Morris, Senior Consultant, **Working Families** with Rachel Collier, Chief Talent Officer, **iCrossing**

Highlights:

- Any manager training must be real to be effective, learning works best when people have the opportunity to reframe their own experiences.

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- There are a number of stages that need to be undertaken for really effective learning from cognitive dissonance to trust to personal commitment – you can't miss a stage.
- Providing managers with practical tools and opportunities to share experiences is invaluable.

Delegates also discussed the point that whilst the measure of success ultimately is that flexibility is so embedded there are no more requests for flexible working, it is important to measure flexible working to identify where and why it is working and not working. And that when you measure statistics the key is to keep the same measures, and see if they move over time, rather than keep changing what you're measuring.

Flexible working for transactional teams

Speaker: Jonathan Patterson, Development Director, DWF

This session covered the different ways of working and included cross-generational along with flexible and agile working. Delegates discussed ways to devise a pattern that suits the needs of their organisation, their employees and clients.

After a delicious lunch and plenty of opportunity to network delegates returned to the main conference room to hear the rest of our discussion sessions.

Denise Priest from Bright Horizons introduced the new Working Families publication *The Employers Guide to Childcare* and talked about how important it was for employers to support, in any way they could, their employees childcare needs. The audience then heard from three very different organisations with three different but complimentary approaches to supporting staff. Regina McEvoy, from Thomson Reuters told delegates how valuable to staff and the organisation their offer of back up care was. Jane Maharry, Head of Childcare Services at the University of Oxford talked about the success of their workplace nurseries and the benefits in terms of recruitment and retention. Whilst Hana Searson, Director, Barclays Leadership Academy & Co-Chair of Barclays Working Families Network talked about the value of support with childcare from an employee's point of view. Questions ranged from what about parents of teenagers and dealing with the accompanying challenges to the role of employee assistance programmes. Sarah Jackson summarised the discussion saying that it doesn't matter the size of an organisation there was something that every employer could do to help employees manage their childcare challenges.

In the last of our discussion sessions Older Workers: opportunities and challenges, Stephen Burke, Director, United for All Ages provided the keynote address. He suggested a new strapline for Working Families work that works for all ages and talked delegates through the many benefits of employing older workers, not least their experience and longevity. Fiona Cannon, Group Director, Diversity & Inclusion, Lloyds Banking Group gave an entertaining insight into the Lloyds retired affiliates programme and how staged retirement was helping to retain skills whilst allowing older workers to take a step back from the workplace. Finally Ricky Somal, Equality & Diversity Lead, Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust talked about how they are supporting older workers with progression training and development support.

Sarah Jackson closed the conference, thanking all our speakers and sent an enthusiastic audience back to their work places brimming with inspiration and ideas.