

Leading the legal way - Retaining top talent

Former Managing Partner turned coach, Iain Blatherwick reflects on how the challenges of retaining top talent have become more complex over the last 18 months and some steps to safeguard against this.

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A recent [survey](#) by recruiter Robert Half reported that nine out of ten of the chief executives surveyed were worried about their ability to retain valued people. Factors identified ranged from burn-out and people wanting a change, through to the impact on corporate culture of remote working as there were fewer integration activities at work, less teamwork and a growing distance between colleagues. It is also apparent that geography is much less of a factor in employment decisions, so the opportunities for people to find new roles, without even having to leave home in some cases, has increased.

Some businesses are using this to support a drive for people to return to offices, but that hasn't always landed too well either so clearly a balance needs to be struck.

For creative businesses, none of these challenges are insurmountable and I highlight two areas where leaders should focus:

1. **Line management** – the quality of a line manager can make or break the relationship between employer and employee. It is all very well having values and goals as a business, but if your line managers do not live up to those values or do their job properly then you have failed at the first hurdle. All too often line-management is thrust upon people as they progress, without any thought about whether they will be good at the role and without development or training. You need to be clear what authority the line manager has, so they can be transparent with their team. Take promotion – a [LinkedIn Workforce Learning Report](#) this year stated that employees with progression options stay at their businesses twice as long, so do your line managers have authority to discuss promotions with their teams and if so are they clear what the criteria and opportunities are?

Choose your line-managers wisely, invest in them and be clear what the scope of their role is – and if they are good, trust them don't tie their hands.

2. **Culture** – A lot is said about culture, but what does that actually mean for an employee? People want to be proud of where they work, but also want a sense of belonging and it is this latter which is key at the moment. There may well have been less integration opportunities, but that need not be the case. The best businesses are using the opportunity for virtual meetings to involve people in a range of activities which would never have been possible through relying on getting everyone in a room. Shared learning sessions or facilitated discussions with topics including gender, race, mental wellbeing, financial wellbeing, through to the challenges facing working parents or learning about the menopause are happening and I have seen far more open, honest and engaged discussions than I have experienced before. There are also now so many more opportunities for fantastic online social events too, which are more inclusive than before, where for example childcare, distance from home or even the nature of the event might have restricted those who could attend to a usual core group.

The office clearly does still have role to play as it helps embed team spirit, support supervision and benefits new team members, but anyone waiting for everyone to be back is missing an opportunity to engage their people in a new way and help with learning and providing support in a broader way than previously. This will provoke deeper conversations and create stronger bonds than ever before.

Iain Blatherwick spent 11 years successfully leading law firm Browne Jacobson. Since stepping down from the managing partner role, Iain has completed the Academy of Executive Coaching's (AOEC) practitioner Diploma Programme in executive coaching and is accredited by the European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC). He recently launched [Space + Time](#), an executive coaching programme aimed at c-suite level business leaders which offers support in horizon scanning and key decision making.

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