

# Our Journey to a 4-Day Week

## The Why

In 2018 Forbes Most Stressful Jobs list included Event Coordinator at number 5, just behind Police Officer, Commercial Pilot, Fire Fighter, and Military Personnel, so as an events business and employer, we have a big responsibility for the mental well-being of our team.

We have the greatest team in the world - they are rockstars and superheroes all rolled into one. The business' success has been and will continue to be on their merit. So naturally, we want to retain our team for as long as possible. With the aforementioned stress that our team go through, we decided to offer them a reduction of hours without reducing pay or holiday time. This is in the form of a 4-day work week. Our topline reasoning for this was to offer a better work-life balance and allow them to achieve goals and prosper outside of their career. We favoured implementing a 4-day week over other options as we are a small team and there are many times in our typical work week where we need the whole team present, either within the office or online.

We have been at the sharp end of embracing automation for the last 3 years and have heavily reduced our need for manual process in most administrative tasks. As technology progresses, more of these tasks will be alleviated by advanced systems. Rather than reduce headcount, or redeploy people, we choose to give that time back to our team.

## The How

- We started with a 6-month trial of a 4-day week, with Friday being the day off.
- We considered splitting the team to come in on differing days, however, there are too many moments when we need the whole team present. We decided to make the day off uniform across all employees so we could sculpt a new work rhythm that ensured efficiency without losing continuity.
- There would be no decrease in salary or holiday allowance.
- We requested that the team could schedule all appointments (Doctors, Dentist etc) on Fridays when possible.
- Operating a 3-day work week was deemed unachievable so, in the case of bank holidays falling on a Monday or Friday, we work the remainder of that week.
- We made our clients aware of our 4-day week trial 3 months in advance, which resulted in zero kickback or negativity.
- We planned ahead of the trial to minimise any non-core tasks. Internal meetings were halved, and we upgraded our tech stack to further reduce time-heavy repetitive tasks. These ideas were organically brainstormed and implemented by the team, rather than the business leaders.

## The Learnings

We made the assumption that most employers might make - employees would relish the idea of working reduced hours with no effect to wage. We were wrong. Halfway through the trial, we interviewed the team and found that if we had asked them beforehand, half of the team would have chosen not to make the move to a 4-day week. Interestingly, it was the younger half of the team that would have preferred to keep things the way they were. There were a range of reasons, including the feeling that their work-based education might slow down. As individuals who are early on in their career, every day is a chance to upskill so by working 1 less day a week would this influence their long term goals? There was also the social aspect to consider - Friday was always the day we would have after work drinks as a team, so we were essentially taking away an element of their social life.

When asked again after the 6-month trial, however, the whole team was unanimous in not wishing to revert back to a 5-day week.

In truth, no matter how many conversations and plans of actions you have, the cracks will show with a move of this scale. People will feel overwhelmed with less time to complete their tasks until they adapt. We all have our work rhythm that we have built up over the years; some people can not gear into Monday mornings, others start to switch off towards the end of Friday afternoons. Implementing a 4-day week requires you to re-programme your work rhythm. Presenteeism is a thing of the past. Work becomes a sprint rather than a jog.

## The Results

The key driver for success was one question: "Has the move to a 4-day week improved the quality of your life?". However, as a business we would need to maintain productivity without having to invest more into headcount, so we also needed to ask ourselves, "Were we able to maintain productivity?" and "Were we able to maintain a profit margin?"

**Has the move to a 4-day week improved the quality of your life?** This was a unanimous 'yes' from the team when asked. People expressed that they had more time to spend with their loved ones as well as themselves. They have the opportunity to get away and travel more, get involved with philanthropic projects, and utilise the time to upskill themselves. In one case, the extra day has meant that a team member is able to return to Spain more often to spend time with their father. "Life admin" seemed to be a recurring theme, with people reporting that they are able to get on top of their housework, finances etc and are now able to actually fully enjoy their weekend.

*Even though profit and productivity were NOT the drivers for this move, for others to be able to start this conversation with their own business, it is a question that is going to get asked, so here are the results that have been beneficial side effects of the trial:*

**Were we able to maintain productivity?** As a business, we focus on output and measure our productivity on the quality of our events. Over this 6-month trial period of a 4-day week, we doubled the size of our largest event. We only increased by 1 additional head hired halfway through the trial, and we managed to jump from 1500 people to 3000 people. All other events were maintained in size and volume.

**Were we able to maintain a profit margin?** Over the period of January - June we saw a YOY revenue increase of 42%, with a profit margin increase from 22 to 25%. The boost in revenue can be attributed to the growth of our largest event, RecFest.

*So yes, this trial has been considered a great success and something we will now bake into the DNA of the business as an ongoing way of working.*

## What's Next?

The 4-Day week is here to stay! However, this is on the condition that it continues to improve the quality of life for our team. Following on from the success of our first trial, we have decided to implement a few more changes of practice to further improve our team's work-life balance. This includes offering "school run hours" for team members with child commitments and therefore wanting to work part-time (they will still benefit from the 4-day week).

We have also introduced the 'right to protest', without the loss of pay. Not only do we fully support our team to stand up for what they believe in, the current political climate creates frustration in people. We would rather let them channel this in their own way, and come back to work more focused. Finally, we have introduced "work from home" for members of the team with commutes that are considered detrimental to their work-life balance.

## Summary

*Our 4-day week trial has been a learning curve and enlightening for the business on a number of levels:*

- Jumping off at the deep end and trialling something completely new can help illuminate both challenges and opportunities alike that no amount of groundwork or preparation could expose.
- Having a deeper 'purpose' truly does ensure that you maintain razor-sharp focus and keep your eye on the prize. In the case of our 6-month trial, if this change didn't result in a better quality of life for our team, it would have failed.
- Sharing your learnings after experiencing a major transformation within your business should be mandatory. This is the only way our peers will be able to take our experiment to the next level and avoid the pitfalls others have experienced.
- Change does not need to have a high monetary value to make a meaningful impact. However, it can be a side effect.
- Communication is key! Ensure transparency with your team and customers.
- Change can be tough no matter how finely tuned your team is. But if you want our advice, give yourself a trial period and make sure you complete the course.

The Recruitment Events Co. is a 12-person events business, based out of Canterbury and London, focused on the recruiting and resourcing market.