

Tech giants Amazon, Apple force people back to offices. Why you shouldn't do the same

Many big tech companies have declared a return-to-office policy for 2023. They said they'd fire those who don't want to follow it. Now, that's radical!

Office attendance has already reached 70-90% in Europe and the Middle East, while certain Asian cities are reporting rates of 80% to 110%, which means some workers spend even more time in the office than before the pandemic.

Why is it happening? Executives believe that in-person collaboration leads to higher productivity. Statistics, however, say otherwise: 90% of employees who work from home say they are as productive as they're in the office.

The majority of employees are unwilling to return to the office. For instance, in a survey of Apple employees, 76% of respondents admitted that they were dissatisfied with the company's return-to-office plans.

With 5 years of experience as an HR People Partner, I am a big advocate for hybrid work, when the best of the two worlds meet. Here's why you shouldn't force your team to return to the office full time.

Talent loss

A 2023 survey shows nearly 40% of employees would quit their company if it took away their ability to work from home. Another half anonymously admitted they'd stop trying so hard to perform if they were forced to return to in-office work.

Younger employees highly value career growth and flexibility that benefits their wellbeing: 65% of millennials appreciate greater work-life balance and 34% are willing to switch jobs if the new workplace allows them to work remotely. And many startups still offer remote and there's a chance you'll lose a strong specialist.

It's not only about losing people you already have in your company, however. Offering a full-time office position may not attract valuable players to the team — some won't even consider your job offer.

With the shift to remote work in 2020, many people moved from large cities to suburbs or even to other countries. And remote format allows you to hire talent from anywhere — not just from the city where your office is located.

Some companies do find employees even on the other side of the world and relocate them so that they can work from the office, but this incurs additional costs that not every startup can afford.

Employee dissatisfaction

A recent study by Tracking Happiness found that the opportunity to work remotely increases employee happiness by 20%, with zoomers feeling especially satisfied (and there are more and more of them in the job market).

Employees who can maintain work-life balance, have time for hobbies, household duties and childcare will be more loyal to your company.

According to a study conducted by Stanford University involving 16,000 workers, remote work led to a 13% increase in productivity. This boost in performance was credited to factors such as a quieter and more convenient working environment, resulting in more calls per minute, and fewer breaks and sick days, leading to longer work shifts.

Additionally, the study revealed that workers reported higher levels of job satisfaction, and the rate of employee turnover was reduced by 50%.

Hybrid work can satisfy all

Despite the many benefits of remote work, the key benefit of coming back to the office is in-person interaction. Offline communication does help brainstorm, and the manager has a clearer understanding of what their employees are doing and how to help them. Having a more personal work environment helps mentor new hires and foster teamwork. Face-to-face communication can improve the quality of work and help avoid conflicts.

There's an option that offers the best of both worlds — hybrid work. Instead of the return-to-office policy, it's better to allow people to work from whenever but also be in the office for, say, two days a week.

According to a *Dice report* published in 2022, the majority of tech professionals (60%) expressed a preference for working fully remotely as their top workplace arrangement. Additionally, 20% indicated a desire to work from home more than half the time, but still listed a part-time office-based schedule as their second most preferred option.

As a manager, it is crucial for you to organise the hybrid work properly. First of all, distribute the tasks to work remotely and in the office. While at home these may be things that require concentration and analytical processing, in the office they may be discussions, meetings, brainstorming – anything that demands interaction with colleagues.

If your team is spread all over the world and it is not possible to gather everyone in one office, you can rent a room in a coworking space in the cities where you have the largest number of employees.

Renting a coworking space is much cheaper than renting an office, while the team has a meeting place. Hot desking at WeWork, for example, will cost you about \$30 per day or some \$400 per month, depending on its location.

You don't have to rent a large office space like you did before the pandemic. You can have half or even three times less space without assigning a seat to an employee and implement a workspace reservation system.

In fact, when the pandemic started, employers realised that saving on rent was one of the biggest benefits of remote work. IBM, for instance, reduced real estate costs by \$50M a year. Overall, six out of 10 employers admit cost saving is a significant benefit of remote work.

And we finally need to get rid of the cliché that employees perform well only when working from the office full-time. Especially when statistics say otherwise. An employee's career should not be influenced by being in the office, at home,

or traveling, as long as he or she shows results.

Embracing this way of thinking enables companies to expand their candidate pool, attract highly qualified candidates who prioritise remote or hybrid work, and improve employee retention rates.

Olga Sturova is HR People Partner at Flyer One Ventures.

Read also

Helping startups grow and outperform the market from Kyiv, London, and Warsaw, a profile of Flyer One ventures

Article by OLGA STUROVA