



RETHINKING THE OFFICE

Appearing on a recent podcast hosted by BDO, DJB Client Director Yvonne Hills – with fellow guests Katrina Kostic Samen of KKS Savills and Darren Comber of Scott Brownrigg – discuss the future of the office and the shift to remote working.

DJB serves as a case study for the conversation since the firm has been largely remote-working based for 15 years. In the episode Yvonne signposts key considerations for businesses now making the move towards greater flexibility.

Yvonne begins by addressing the question on many people's lips: How do you encourage collaboration when teams are working remotely?

"Social interaction is important and we encourage people to work together. We have a lot of lawyers who work together on projects – which they can do either remotely or in one of our five offices. Provided you have the right technology and right working from home environment, there's nothing to stop you from being just as productive at home. Location shouldn't be a barrier."

While remote working has its benefits, it is not for everyone. Training and mentoring is one of the main limitations of a remote working model. While that is not a problem for DJB since all our lawyers are highly experienced and can work without supervision, for traditional law firms and companies in other sectors, the provision of training and in person support must be taken into account.

Building on this, Darren identifies a key benefit of the

remote model and one which we are very passionate about – being able to tap into a global talent pool: "99% of the world's global talent do not live near my physical legacy offices... Yvonne, I'm interested in how you maintain a culture? How do people maintain a sense of belonging with your firm?"

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Yvonne explains: "The reason I think our model has been so successful is that we have ensured the culture is right first. We are not a virtual firm. We have a one-team approach. To start with our lawyers receive a full induction at head office, where they meet all the support departments and key resources which are centrally based. So, when you start working from home full-time, you know who you're picking up the phone to... Communication is key... Lawyers need to have regular check-ins with management, weekly calls to see how people are. I think communication at all levels and knowing there's someone checking in on you is so important."

In spite of the shift to remote working, it is the opinion of many that businesses and their people need to retain a presence in the office. At DJB, we have five offices around the UK which people can choose to work in. Yvonne comments, "The motivation behind our model is

obviously to attract the best quality lawyers. To do that, we offer them flexibility. It's the option to work where they want to work."

Indeed, while maintaining office space in regional locations is important to the success of flexible working, we try hard to reduce the need for our lawyers to 'stay late' in the office.

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Yvonne explains how: "We allow our lawyers to focus simply on the law. So, we remove the non-chargeable aspects. These are the bits the lawyers don't like doing and ultimately the reason why they are at their desk until midnight."

A key word which the podcast guests agree on in relation to remote working is "trust" and the common belief that if people are not in the office, they're not working. Katrina comments: "There's no way that it's going to be hours-based any more..." Building on this, Yvonne highlights how the transactional nature of legal work lends itself well to judging on tasks not hours: "If you know you have to have a deal done by a certain date, you'll do it between 11 and 3 or you'll do it after the kids have gone to bed or you'll take a language class knowing that you can pick it up later. You can manage your own time."

The podcast sheds light on concerns surrounding remote working: communication, collaboration, mentoring, productivity and maintaining a sense of belonging. Yvonne's overriding message? 'Communication is key'.



Yvonne Hills

If you're interested in the topics raised and would like to talk to someone about your organisation, please feel free to contact our Client Director, Yvonne Hills.

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