



# THE MODERN WORKPLACE

how to build it, grow it—  
and prosper with it



A ARTICLE BY **emphas!sHR** CEO  
& CO-FOUNDER, LAURENCE MARX



As they have always done, work styles are changing in step with work product, employer expectations and employee priorities. The emergence of the data-focused economy means fewer feet on the factory floor, and more hands on keyboards, and this evolution sets the stage for the ongoing debate over the modern workplace—what it is, how it’s best managed, and where it’s going from here.

**DO YOU HAVE A MODERN WORKPLACE?**

It’s not so far away as it may seem. Chances are that your environment incorporates at least some of these features already.

TRADITIONAL WORKPLACE	MODERN WORKPLACE
Top-down communication, evaluation and review structure	Two-way communication with frequent and <b>informal touchpoints</b>
Nine-to-five in-office environment	Partial use of <b>flexible work hours</b> /locations
Standard benefits based primarily on cost value, bolstering salary	<b>Imaginative benefits</b> based on personal impact and work-life balance
Accrued time off based on tenure	<b>Unlimited time off</b> based on productivity
Significant investment of time and/or cost in management of HR duties	<b>Reduced HR overhead</b> due to less stringent policy enforcement
	

There are other specific examples of what makes for a modern workplace, examples more often than not chosen out of particular circumstances, markets or industries. **Yet these broad strokes are common to many, even most, modern workplace environments that allow us to better understand how to build, grow and prosper from the way people want to work today.**



**IS IT JUST A WORKPLACE—OR ARE WE DEFINING A COMPANY’S CULTURE?**

An employer may be tempted to think of the workplace as a system—a machine that performs a task and requires tuning and maintenance to perform optimally. However, employees often see it more like everyday life—an ecosystem of influences and expectations, perks and personalities. To them, it’s not a work environment. It’s a culture. And it is the evaluation of this culture that determines whether employers are successfully implementing the modern workplace.

**Culture matters and employees are paying attention. Consider the issue of workplace flexibility; a recent survey showed that, across a broad range of small businesses in different industries:**

60%52%72%



**60% of employees** are confident that they could work remotely.



**52% of employees** feel their productivity increases when working remotely



**72% of employees** prefer to work at home, given the option.





Culture is a big subject and an almost infinitely diverse one. That's why it's critical for an employer to develop an employee plan.....

a strategy every bit as detailed as a business plan, and aligned to the greater objective of improving company results.

For example, consider the imaginative and sometimes lavish employee perks now offered, often by startups and tech firms. While basketball hoops in the break room and on-premises pet daycare may strike many as outlandish, their originality and specificity can appeal strongly to a certain kind of employee in a certain kind of field.

The challenge for the employer's employee plan, then, is to align these cultural benefit to the value of the work product—without going broke in the process. Fortunately, many of the most widely-appreciated cultural benefits cost very little to implement, and require an investment mainly in the employer's time to actively manage and fine-tune their delivery.

By carefully managing this side of workplace culture, the employer gets the edge in recruiting and employees enjoy a more fulfilling—and longer-lasting—experience. Best of all, you don't have to spend thousands on frequent company outings or for an army of massage therapists to visit your offices every Thursday.

## KEEPING COMMUNICATION LINES OPEN

This brings us to a hallmark of the modern workplace: the idea of open, constant, two-way communication between management and staff. 360-degree reviews are the norm, and formal annual evaluations are taking a backseat to frequent, less-formal checkpoint conversations.

This evolution is mutually beneficial. It absolves managers and ownership of the additional documentation and process that comes with rigid, formal reviews, and it promotes a sense of empowerment and ownership in employees over the work product. An open communication approach also lends employers the credibility to make adjustments to culturally-critical policy without fostering resentment among employees who might otherwise feel that management is putting the pinch on benefits for less-than-satisfactory reasons.

As with so many other aspects of life, performance feedback is best when it is given freely at the appropriate moment.

A heartfelt pat on the back in the hall is more motivating than a sweaty handshake across a conference table at review time.



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# FLEXIBILITY IN WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Another common element in modern workplaces and positive cultures is workplace flexibility—a broad term that finds execution in several different ways. Here are two common manifestations to consider, flex working & unlimited paid time off (UPTO).

Renewed attention on **work-life balance**, particularly among Millennials, and easy, affordable access to technology are making the virtual office more and more attractive for employers and employees alike.

For employees, flex working lets them take ownership of their process and product in a way that a rigid in-office environment may not allow. It can increase job satisfaction, accelerate personal development and responsibility, and of course it's a strong endorsement of the employer's faith in the employee's personal integrity to trust that the work will be done well, even without direct supervision.

The flip-side of this is that employers can improve recruitment, increase retention and significantly reduce costs though reduced footprint and facilities.

For smaller companies where every employee wears multiple hats, however, this can be a challenge; when one person is out of the office, it may mean three or four roles are compromised. To make these flex work arrangements mutually beneficial, employers should:

Make sure candidates are vetted for the proper personality fit to suit the flex work model.

Define in the employee handbook how flex working is permitted, and to which roles, so everyone understands that company interest, not personal preference, guiding those decisions.

Include flex work productivity in formal and informal reviews, measuring KPIs against changes in flex schedules, in communication policy.

Invest as necessary in the appropriate technology and software to allow flex work employees to perform at their best when off site.



Average real estate savings with full-time telework is **\$10,000** employee/year.



## NAVIGATING UNLIMITED PERSONAL TIME OFF (UPTO)

In the modern workplace, UPTO's certainly one of the most progressive concepts out there—the idea that an employee is not only empowered to manage their work unsupervised, but to take time off as needed rather than according to a set policy of accruals and cash-outs.

Employees like the idea of UPTO. That makes it a powerful recruitment tool and a positive influence on workplace culture. In some industries, it has even become the norm. As with flex work, it emphasizes the importance of work results over hours spent in a particular chair.

Employers, likewise, enjoy the removal of an administrative burden since tracking time off accrued, used and cashed out can take a fair bit of an entrepreneur's time.

As with every other dimension of the modern workplace explored here, constant and open communication between management and employees is the key to ensuring that employees are getting the greatest possible benefit, and that the employer is not suffering from abuse of the policy.

## THE MODERN WORKPLACE—AND HOW IT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

These various aspects of the modern workplace—a deliberate fostering of workplace culture, open, two-way communication, flexible work arrangements—together create an environment that more accurately reflects the priorities, expectations and loyalties of today's workforce. As any employer-employee relationship is built on trust and the expectation of mutual benefit, these factors each reflect that relationship.

To be certain, none of these characteristics are applicable to every company; yet for most, some combination of these will yield better results for the employer, greater happiness and loyalty for the employee, and greater shared success for the company and all who work there.

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# 3 SIMPLE BENEFITS OF TELECOMMUTING

EMPLOYEES ARE  
MORE PRODUCTIVE  
WHEN THEY WORK  
FROM HOME

WHEN WORKING  
FROM HOME,  
EMPLOYEES ARE  
MORE LOYAL

THEY MAKE  
TIME FOR FITNESS  
AND HEALTH

The modern workplace is a brilliant reflection of the many ways people interact and collaborate. To adopt the principles of the modern workplace is to embrace a deeper understanding of people themselves.

**91%**  
of employees say they're more productive when working from home

**6<sup>out of</sup> 10**  
employers identify cost savings as a significant benefit to telecommuting.