

Part 1 - What Makes A Great Place To Work?

Welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today, we're going to start a five part series and it's all about your work environment, your workplace. And we're going to look at a few different things that dovetail into one another. So the next five episodes will be about the workplace and we're going to call it the workplace series.

So workplace series number one for 2021 is all about what makes your work place a great place to work or what makes anywhere a great place to work. And what do recruiters look for when they're choosing a place to work? And we will let Fulyana lead the topic because it's her idea. Thank you, Kim. It's a joint effort because we both come up with very similar topics. And they are all about work as Kim just said.

I think let's start with what people look for when they're looking for a new place of employment. So if we look at it, there's a whole lot of surveys and there was a whole lot of research done on it.

For example, if you go to the university students who top the class and are ready to join a company and talk to them about what are they looking for in a placement. So I thought that's a good place to start and to gauge it from the outside before we go into the organization. It's how do we look at ourselves? So they're looking for a place.

This is again based on research more recently, it was in the legal environment where they're looking for legal recruits to come to companies, accounting firms and legal firms. And by

and large, over 90% said they look for things like the culture of the organization. What sort of culture they have, what sort of reputation they have in the market place. How are they performing, what's the general performance like? You know, they might be saying and doing all the right things and a great place to work. That's not exactly right, they're doing very well, but does it satisfy the personal needs of the person who is looking forward?

So, to me, I think that's a good way to start thinking about now that we are in an organization, what is it that we want? How do we want to attract the right talent to retain them and make them happy when they're working?

It's interesting to hear that because my experience and my views will be based on what I went through with graduate recruitment campaigns as a recruiter in the construction industry. 1st 3 things that they're saying are important were things that were not important for this group. So we're talking engineers, architects, quantity surveyors, and they're in their final year of university. So I was recruiting from the government for a federal Australia wide organization. They had already made a value judgment about what the organization was because it was public sector, it was bureaucratic, it was all of those things that they necessarily didn't want. You know, they weren't looking for, put it that way, that, they weren't looking for that safety or security or bureaucracy, you know, it's good and bad forms.

So the culture wasn't what they were looking for because they had already decided it was going to be a bureaucracy and boring reputation. They really didn't know it. It wasn't an

organization that promoted what it did particularly well because it built things for all other government organizations. So it wasn't well known in the community unless it was the embassies. They had a very good reputation for embassies both here and overseas.

But what they were looking for, the engineers particularly, was that this organization was the only organization that they could join where they would qualify for professional membership of their Institute of Engineers after two years. So we had a two year rotation plan, development plan for them. So they spent six months in different sections doing different things that were related to their professional development and that qualified them for full membership of their institution at the end of two years and that was significantly earlier than anywhere else that they could go.

All of the big name companies, all of the places that had the reputation, that could offer them perhaps more exciting work in their eyes, all of those things, none of that came into being. The reason they wanted to join the organization was because it gave them this quick start into the next level of professionalism that they needed for their careers. That was the deciding factor in the construction industry at that time. And I think it's probably fair to say that that's probably still the case that engineers still need to have that two years of working on various projects that qualifies them for full membership and it is the membership of the institution that drives their careers. And so they are looking for a very different initial introduction to an organization.

But what happens with that when we look at the next stage,

which is what I just started to talk about from inside the organization. What can we, once we've made that decision and we've got these people in and we know that their focus is there, what can we do to join their focus with the organization's focus and still encourage them to think about not leaving after two years because we don't want to put two years worth of training into someone just to see them go to somewhere else that they think is a better deal.

That wasn't the case. After two years of seeing what work they could be involved with, what opportunities there were across Australia to stay in the same organization, but move around and to go overseas some of the time as well, then the loss rate was quite low. It was probably greater in the quantity surveyor field because there was a lesser number of quantity surveyors that qualified every year and there was an increasing demand for them. So we simply couldn't match the salaries, we certainly could match the experiences that they had, but we couldn't match the salaries because obviously it's an organization with a salary cap. What happened is that they would go away, they would get a bit more experience in things and then they would come back, they would come back at another level and know the organization already and be welcomed back because they knew the organization, They knew the systems and what had to happen. But they had this other bit of experience that they could bring back into our workplace and develop the next lot that were coming through.

I would say quantity surveyors were probably the most volatile in that sense that they joined because they saw a professional progression. Engineers absolutely joined because they wanted that quick start for their professional qualification and the

architects, there was probably a little bit more knowledge within the architectural community about what sort of work they will be involved in. And in those days we ran the organization in multi discipline teams, which was unusual as well because in most other organizations in construction, if you were an engineer, architect, quantity surveyor, that's the team you went into and you didn't work with anyone else. But in our organization it was multi discipline which meant you were in a team with engineers of every discipline with quantity surveyors with drafting people with clerical admin people with the work supervisors, if you're out on general maintenance stuff. So it was a much more rounded approach to construction, we thought and that's why it went that way. These days, you know, we're talking some time ago, but I don't see in that arena because architecturally I still keep a hand on what's happening around.

I don't see a whole lot of change other than there are other organizations that have taken on the multidisciplinary approach to construction. I think provides them with economies of scale as well. But you know, that's a little bit off the topic for my experience at the base level of recruitment, we were looking at people who saw that the organization could provide something that they wanted, that they had set as a goal or that they needed for their career in a specific period of time, regardless of what the reputation of the organization was or what they did.

They didn't care particularly these were campaigns where I would get, I've mentioned it before, 1100 applications for 10 positions. I think the fact that it was government as well and it's a means to an end on one part of what you said, but it also had a reputation and the reputation was you get trained well,

you will be working with very seasoned and known people who have worked on huge projects that probably, you can see examples of them around Sydney, whether it's the Harbor Bridge and Opera House, whatever they actually work towards those and you might too. I'm going to work with so and so who designed such and such and I think that again, that sense was an attraction.

The other thing is now that once you go there, are you able to express yourself when we come to that? That applies back then, even though not spoken about as much it applies now and in the future when people join or they are in an organization, they want to know that they can contribute and not just the bit of the job, they can come up with ideas, they can be listened to. They can be taken seriously and not just put labels on - you only just started and you're only this age or you haven't done any. And then talking about things that we covered before and that is, we've done this before, it didn't work. This is really not a good thing.

So if the culture of an organization allows that to happen, then people wouldn't really like to come to it and wouldn't like to stay in it because they want to be able to think aloud with other like minds. They want to be able to be respected and respect other people and they also would very much like to know that they are being taken seriously and that can still be a learning just because I've got an idea that I think it's really good, by listening to like minds with respect and with deeper knowledge than me, much more years of experience together, we can even refine my idea or even shelve it okay or say no to it, but not until it was listened and discussed and we do that for each other.

I think too, that there is a misconception that someone coming into an organization after three or four years at university thinks they know it all, out to change the world and that's really a very narrow value judgment that we place on people. Yes, they are enthusiastic because they've come out of studying, since they were five years old, most of them, you know, started at kindergarten went straight through to the end of university. So they come out of study and that routine and they're into what they see as the real world and it's exciting and so when we are not all enthusiastic, we are not excited, let them be excited and let that flow down. Let's see it, see your workplace from their eyes, see how exciting it is to be in an organization, not just where you go for your job, but it's also about the judgment of people saying, well, they've just been at university for the last four years, they haven't been in the real world.

Now, that's just not true because you look at any university student today and yes, I study, but they probably have to work as well. They have to live somewhere. Even if they're living at home, they may not be paying board, might have to do things. So they've got to juggle time and focus. And it's the focus thing that I find most fascinating, is that they can go from a work environment where they have to be focused on what they're doing because that's what they get paid for and then suddenly they've got to switch their head around to whatever it is they're studying. It takes me a day to work out, Oh no, I'm not thinking about that now, I've got to go onto this thing and then they've got to do that every day essentially. They're still challenging themselves and still do all the things that we might be sharing the load with someone else when we're in a work environment. So we go home and there's someone that washes the dishes

or someone that does something else.

So I think we need to just readjust our views and not just wipe them off by using the word just and saying they've just been at university. It's not a free ride, it's not an easy road and they have studied to get where they are, they've had to pass exams have been tested and we're in a work environment, probably haven't had to be tested for a long time. So we don't know what it's like to be examined on the knowledge we have. I really rail against the phrase - they've just been at university, they'll learn, they'll be able to get into the real world. What is the real world? They've been living in the real world.

So true.

Today, I'm not going to rant anymore.
It's very appropriate.

The other thing is when we talk about reputation and the company, so the help received from the outside still in the past, I think we did learn a lot on our marketing and how we want to be perceived as an organization. Well, I really think this is completely different now. People have access to information through social media and all sorts of things that get to know a lot more from a comment by a person about having a good day and not a good day. So you can't just rely on, I'll tell them what they think of me. I'll just go why I'm different to the competitor and why they should do business with me, blah, blah, blah.

This can be okay. And we need them but we need them to be genuine and deep and we need them to stand up in every environment. So people do talk differently on social media.

People will find out what you say and what you really do, even if you're looking at the company values and behaviors, if they not practiced that would come out. I think to me what's much, much more powerful now, it's the depth of what you're doing. It's the genuineness of what you're doing. It's much more observed and noticed. If you just do the spin and the pr it won't cut it.

Are we then in a position, if we're the organization doing the recruiting, are we in a position to completely rethink recruitment in terms of forms that people fill out? So they're filling out a form to apply for a job. Do we ask them what they think of the organization? Do we ask them to rate it in terms of their needs for the next two years to see if they actually know about the organization or if they're just pushing the barrel of oil, apply for 100 jobs and see which one floats to the surface?

And that's why when you do surveys about who's the top 10 or 20 or 50 whatever worldwide organizations that people want to work for, and why. And this way, it's at the point where either people by perception, I really like to work there because everything I heard and the people, I know a lot of people work there and they say this, this, this and this and whatever or I work there and it's fantastic and I want to work there a lot longer if I can, etcetera, I think those and then finding out why and this is what really this whole topic about the workplace is about, is what are those ingredients? What are those things that people are looking for? And respect is really high on the agenda and people respecting them, not having hierarchical respect that is not really respect, but respecting each other no matter what.

So for example when you are doing brainstorming in a meeting, if it's the senior leadership team then that's okay. But they should be having some of them introduce people from the different departments and different areas of the department to come to those meetings. At those meetings they talk about, there's no rank in the room. Everyone's views are equally respected and equally valuable, not to interrupt, all the good rules I guess that show respect, but that has to be practiced in the day today.

Whether you're on virtual meetings like we are now, whether you are in face to face meetings, how do you listen, how do you respect? You give credit to other people, that sort of thing. Do you share your knowledge? How do you share? It's also the things that you don't talk about.

So we had Taylor Proctor who talked to us in 2019 and she talked about a system that she uses called the big six plus one and there were six topics and the plus one was always the one that she forgets. So there were six topics that you don't talk about, that you don't bring into the conversation, that you don't use as dividers in a team environment or any sort of discussion. I'll put the link to that episode at the end of this one so that you can have a listen to that again. But it was things like age and family situation and politics, sport, those sorts of areas, but the age one and the family situation I think is probably the most important because we unconsciously judge people. And so when we go into a team situation we're either protective or we're antagonistic towards the rest of the group and we need to start addressing that because we're not meeting so much in person, it's much easier to let those things fester under the surface of the team environment.

If we just go back to the questions that we asked about doing recruitment activities. I was recently involved in some recruitment for some outdoor rangers for a national park and I was really intrigued by one of the questions and it was the question that I had to ask.

They had determined the questions and we just got handed out which questions we had to ask and I love my questions and I think they gave them to me because they knew that I would love them. They had a job description, the candidates and they've been through, I guess three levels of filtering before they got to the face to face interview. And the first question was, what would you like most about the activities that you're going to do? And that was easy for them because it was all about outdoors and doing things, but we got some interesting answers that they weren't expecting and it wasn't always what the main function of the job was going to be.

And so what they did was allow the management group that were with me on the panel to sort out where people would be best suited for what they saw themselves as, the thing that they wanted to do most in the job. And then the other question was, what would you like to do least? What appeals to you least in this list of job description activities and to a person, it was the administrative tasks which we expected because they were all outdoor ranger types, but they weren't saying that they wouldn't do them. They just said that they would like it the least.

What happened out of that was that this management team were able to look at, what are we making the rangers do that

we could automate because they don't want to do it? We don't want them doing something that they don't want to do. So we've got an opportunity from the coal face. People are telling us this. They wouldn't have found out any other way because the rest of their rangers will be out and they do it and they just go to, as you say, go to social media and say, I've got those forms again. And so the perception of the organization is that they're rangers, but they have to fill out these forms and that's not the case. It's just that they like this the least, they complain about it the most. So it provided an opportunity for this organization to look at their processes as well as bringing in these people and make a change for everyone in the organization. And not just this new group, even though that was the new group, it was a new group that had highlighted the issue for them. It was just a great outcome.

That's really good. If that applies in many other situations, like when you talk about any front line job, customer facing, whether it's a sales role, service role, etcetera, you probably hear the same thing.

My job is to talk to the customer. If I'm, you know, swallowed up and doing paperwork reporting for three hours a day, that time is better spent with a customer. That will also then influence how you structure your organization.

So automation? Absolutely.

How do you do the process and systems to support? But you also look at how do I structure it? Can they have not so much an assistant, but if you like a co worker who is going through the process, whatever, would you structure it different in doing

that? You expand other things that are as a consequence of that, which is if you've got someone who's very experienced ranger or front line person or in a corporate, you're working with someone else who can help you, so you're sharing knowledge, you're helping succession planning. So what you're doing is another person can free you up to do that face to face. But before you know it, after automation can also learn and grow and be, you know, if they want that career path again.

I think we've probably covered stage one, part one of our workplace series and it's all today, about looking at that first introduction, recruiting both sides of the table for that initial impression in an organization.

We'd love to hear what your views are. I think we've talked a little bit too long probably about our views, but that's how we go when we're together, so we will leave it there for part one of the workplace series. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.