

Case study: CIPD Parent Returner Programme

Victoria Plum

Profile

Size: 398 colleagues.

Location: Doncaster with a remote based workforce covering Head Office functions.

Sector: Retail.

People function: Team of three – Head of People & Communications, Talent Acquisition & People Manager and People & Culture Advisor.

Key fact: The first pureplay specialist bathroom online retailer established in 2001 and recently celebrated our 20th Birthday.

Operational context

Victoria Plum is an online national specialist bathroom retailer based in Yorkshire, with an interest in encouraging members of its community to stay and work in the area rather than leaving to work in big cities. Due to the digital nature of its business, it needs to be able to attract employees with specialist skills including IT, website development, digital marketing, and data analysis. The launch of a new design and installation service in 2019 made recruiting and retaining the right people even more critical especially where bathroom knowledge and experience is required.

Problem

Despite having some excellent recruitment opportunities available due to the growth, the Victoria Plum team were finding that people with the skills they needed were not coming forward. They were also conscious that only 30% of their workforce, and just one of 11 executive team members, were female.

Additionally, as early adopters of flexible working, the People team at Victoria Plum were becoming aware that their competitors were catching up with them in terms of the flexibility they were offering, and that they needed to do more to retain their edge.

As a result, they decided to take a more strategic approach to widening their talent pool, by targeting returners and enhancing their flexible offer.

What they did

Having attended the workshops, webinars, and other elements of the programme, the team planned several changes, including:

- Stating on all recruitment adverts that roles are open to flexible working and being open about a willingness to facilitate different working patterns, such as job shares.
- Instigating a mindset and culture shift by educating managers and senior leaders in the business benefits of flexible working.
- Work life balance schedules introduced within the Call Centre to support those colleagues who require a more flexible working pattern to fit their own personal situations
- Reviewing home working opportunities for existing colleagues who had long commutes or parental or caring responsibilities
- Introduction of wellbeing site for colleagues to support with all wellbeing aspects including Mental Health, financial, relationship and beyond. The site provides opportunities for colleagues to reach out to trained MHFA to discuss any personal matters and provides access to pod casts and articles and useful contact numbers to support organisations.

The Head of People and Communications led by example, recruiting part-time employees into her team, and sharing success stories around the boardroom table.

Outcomes

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a hiatus in Victoria Plum's plans and made robust impact analysis impossible at this time. However, the team plan to track the change in the full-time/part-time split across their organisation, as well as changes to the gender dynamic, once more data is available.

More positively, the enforced home working caused by the crisis has increased senior-level awareness of the benefits of flexible working. Employees who were previously head office based moved to permanent remote working from January 2021 following a successful consultation process. The remote working is a hybrid

approach with a Campus for colleagues to use based at the Doncaster Distribution Centre and at the studio used for filming TV adverts in Hessle to enable colleagues to meet and work as and when required.

Top tips

- Advertise your roles as flexible from day one. This will help you stand out from your competitors and attract talented people who might not otherwise apply.
- Getting buy-in from the top is critical. Educate your senior leaders on the positive impact that flexible working will have on your organisation.
- Open people's minds by showing what's possible. Share positive news about part-time recruits and returners to encourage other departments to follow.

Rachel Dackombe, Returner Champion (Victoria Plum)

'Taking part in the CIPD Returner Programme was such a helpful process, and one which we will be building on for a long time to come. We are determined to remain an employer of choice and are now more aware than ever that this will require a creative and flexible-focused approach to recruitment and retention.'

'The practical support and advice was incredibly useful, and we really benefitted from collaborating with our counterparts from other organisations. Hearing their stories of what works opened our minds to what we could do and inspired us to take action.'

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Issued: April 2021 Reference: 8080 © CIPD 2021