



WORKPLACE

CHRIS TOBIAS



ADULT INDUSTRY

Asleep on the job? Perhaps that's a sign of a productive workplace

Recession time again—that anxiety-inducing, antacid-popping, bubble-bursting economic inevitability that comes around like a bad rash every few years. Your list of management to-dos is piled high: cut overhead, retain good employees, remove unproductive ones, improve competitiveness across the board. And now in the age of going green (whatever that means), why don't you cut your carbon footprint too while you're at it?

Cheer up, it's not all bad news and we've got something that will help you hit those nails on the head in one go. It's called the Results Only Work Environment. Sit down with a coffee—you'll like this one.

A few years ago, two HR people at Best Buy (think Noel Leeming on a US scale) had tough nuts to crack. The company was trying to expand, but turnover was high and employees kept getting stressed out. Jody Thompson and Cali Ressler studied the problem and discovered that expectations for employees were too great: the teched-up, always-on employee now had to be always in the office. Workers had less and less time to relax, unwind and pursue their other interests outside work. Burnout smoldered, productivity slumped, and a steady outflow of

employees threatened plans.

Something had to be done, and in strategising their approach, Thompson and Ressler realised that some CEO mandate for flexi-time or similar quick fix wasn't going to cut it. Success hinged on workers achieving targets. The two HR gurus waited patiently for the right opportunity to trial a brilliant idea: make workers accountable not for how many hours they sit at a desk, nor when they sit, nor if they even use a desk at all. Make workers accountable for what matters most: the results.

They swung their experiment into action. With the input of management and staff, new rules were developed and piloted, including:

#1 People at all levels stop doing any activity that is a waste of their time, the customer's time or the company's money.

#7 Nobody talks about how many hours they work.

#9 It's okay to take a nap on a Tuesday afternoon, grocery shop on Wednesday morning or catch a movie on Thursday afternoon.

Thompson and Ressler worked carefully to transition to what they termed ROWE, a Results Only Work Environment (also known as Results Oriented Work Environment). Across company headquarters, their strategy steadily took off, eventually getting CEO support and later rolling out to other business locations.

What were results of ROWE? Productivity shot up an average of 35 percent, turnover dropped 90 percent, and the company has plowed millions in savings from unneeded office space back into their bottom line.

The most shocking discovery: when adults are given the responsibility to act like adults, they act like adults. Micromanaging can take a back seat when people have clearly defined goals to shoot for and the freedom to approach problems however—and whenever—they see fit. Often employees even worked harder when in control of their own schedules.

Did you just raise an eyebrow? Perhaps a bit sceptical? Check out the

book *Work Sucks and How to Fix It* for a play-by-play account of Best Buy's ROWE rollout, or visit culturerx.com to learn more.

Best Buy isn't the only company taking the industrial era work schedule out of the information age. While they're not calling it ROWE, Sun Microsystems went down a similar path both for economic and environmental reasons. The company studied employee behaviour and realised that 98 percent of employees' carbon footprint came from their commute to work—a paltry 1.7 percent of emissions took place on the job using equipment. Sun introduced telecommuting to 56 percent of its workforce, and shaved 29,000 metric tonnes of CO₂ and \$68 million in property costs. IBM has taken similar action.

If it worked for them, think what it could do for you. Some key ideas of ROWE:

- Performance is based on output, not hours

- Clear communication, co-operation, trust and measurable objectives are critical

- Managers assess data and evidence—not feelings, anecdotes and business-as-usual expectations

- Fixed schedules are swapped for flexible, flourishing work arrangements

- Technology is applied in an efficiency-enhancing way, not an office-centric, pre-wireless approach

- Many tasks are place-neutral—that is, they can be accomplished from anywhere using technology

We have state-of-the-art technology at our fingertips—it's time to upgrade our mentality. The problem is that we haven't shrugged off industrial-era thinking and used the technology to its full potential. In economic hard times, innovation and efficiency trump all. Why not the improve the bottom line, make employees happy, slash environmental impacts and save yourself a headache all at once?

Chris Tobias is lead strategist at Forward (www.forward.net.nz) and editor of Celsias.com

SCIENCE

BETTE FLAGLER



PEDDLING VISION

A cycleway might unite the country. Science would enrich it

There is a bit too much traction for John Key's proposal for a national cycleway. Don't get me wrong, I love to ride my bike. I love getting filthy riding in the mud and I love the exhilaration of downhill that comes only after the hard grind up. I even wear with pride the scar on my right calf that is in the shape of a chain ring—earned by a rather spectacular fall I took years ago. Between us, my partner and I have four bikes, one each for the road and one each for the dirt.

So I should embrace the idea of a cycleway. Recession or not, it would be a great thing to have and would be a boost for tourism—look what the Otago Rail Trail has done for that region. But as far as the country is concerned, a bike path is a short-term idea; it is not a focus for the future.

Nick Churchouse wrote about the cycleway in the *Dominion Post* in March, saying the \$50 million 'back of an envelope' budget was insufficient and "creating 3,700 jobs, the Prime Minister's estimate, is possible but it will take years". In the same month, the PM must have been delighted at the coverage he got in *The Wall Street Journal* where he said: "We can use this time to transform the economy to make us stronger so that when the