

You Can Get More Done in a 4-Day Workweek. Really.

I wouldn't have believed it before we tried it at my company

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Near the end of 2017, on a long-haul flight from Auckland to London for a Christmas break with my children, I was catching up on work-related reading when a magazine article caught my eye. The article detailed the results of [a study](#) of UK office workers which found that on average they were productive for fewer than three hours a day. My mind turned to my own business, a trust company called Perpetual Guardian that employed about 240 people, and

to whether we had real measures of productivity across all aspects of our business.

I realized we did not. In response, I decided to run an experiment at Perpetual Guardian for an eight-week period in early 2018, based on the following agreement with my employees: 100% of the agreed output in 80% of the time, for 100% compensation.

In other words, we would try the four-day week to see if it was a way of working better suited for the 21st century, measuring worker value not by hours at a desk or on the shop floor but by productivity. In experimenting with this new way of working, we sought to understand what effect a four-day week might have on individual, team, and company output; profitability, and employee engagement; job satisfaction and well-being.

We knew that to make a four-day week work in practice, we needed to concern ourselves with all the time-wasting activities that find their way into the workday — the personal texts, calls, and emails; the web browsing and overlong meetings; the unnecessary conversations and general office habits that do not amount to anything productive.

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We also knew we needed robust and substantive data, and we ensured the trial was monitored by academics from the University of Auckland and Auckland University of Technology (AUT) who produced qualitative and quantitative reports recording any changes in staff engagement, job satisfaction, well-being, team cohesion, and a host of other metrics.

The results? Our trial exceeded our expectations, improving productivity and profitability at Perpetual Guardian. When looking at job satisfaction,

engagement, and retention, professor of human resource management at AUT, Jarrod Haar identified these job attitudes as being very high compared to New Zealand data of more than 6,000 employees. While these metrics were already high pre-trial, these significantly increased post-trial and the scores were easily the highest Haar had seen in his New Zealand data.

The trial so soundly proved the viability of the four-day week that starting in November 2018, we implemented a four-day week permanently on an opt-in basis. Our opt-in model offers employees the option to work a four-day week and invests our company with the power to withdraw the "gifted" weekly day off if the employee does not hold up their side of the bargain. Since then, we have since seen company revenue and profitability increase by 6% and 12.5% respectively.

The five-day week is a 19th century construct. It is no longer fit for purpose in a developed world where the physical and mental health of workers is compromised, family connections are strained by the intrusion of work into the home by digital means, and the climate change threat is becoming more immediate. The gig economy promised flexibility, but in practice it has come at a human cost; the gig undermines fundamental worker protections, from holiday and sick pay to retirement savings, that have been hard-won over decades of labor organization.

In my own professional life, which began in the City of London in the 1980s, I have experienced and witnessed the true cost — to people and organizations — of an approach to work that focused on time spent instead of the work done. I vowed that I would try to change this when I got the chance, and I discovered that the four-day week gave us the best of all worlds: optimal productivity, work-life balance, and benefits for both employees and employers, including company profitability.

A productivity-focused, reduced-hour model of work such as the four-day week can be achieved by all organizations and across a range of industries. That doesn't mean it is guaranteed to succeed. I tell the company leaders

who I advise that implementing any flexibility or productivity policy is primarily a test of leadership. The leader's ability to comprehend the potential application of the policy in their business and articulate it to staff and other decision-makers will seal its fate.

Ideally, organizations considering a productivity policy should set their purpose first. The four-day week is only one form of flexible working, and it may not be exactly the right form for every company. Leaders should be clear about what they want to achieve at every level of the company, from the board to the management and staff. If the objectives are explicit at the start, success and milestones can be assessed accurately and the important metrics of an organization — productivity, profitability, and the healthy functioning of people — can be measured and managed as never before.

Given the amazing results of the four-day week I witnessed at my own company, and many others since then, I had to document the details of the experiment we conducted, the challenges we faced and overcame, and the broader case for the four-day work week in a book. [*The 4 Day Week: How the Flexible Work Revolution Can Increase Productivity, Profitability, and Well-being, and Create a Sustainable Future*](#) shows business and political leaders and workers how we can have a sustainable, profitable future in which we work less, but are more productive, engaged, and satisfied. This is a work revolution whose time has come.