

Episode 3

## The 4-Day Week: Pioneering Change

With Andrew Barnes

**Ian Tyler:** Welcome to the Better World of Work Podcast by Talent. I'm your host, Ian Tyler, Talent's Group Chief Strategy Officer. And today I'm very excited to be joined by Andrew Barnes to be talking all things 4 day work week but before I kind of go into any elaborate overview as to exactly what that means, Andrew good morning. I'd love you to introduce what the 4 day work week is all about. Welcome.

**Andrew Barnes:** Thanks Ian good to be here. Well, erm, the 4 day work week in reality it's a little bit of clickbait. What this is about is reduced hours working without adversely impacting productivity. So what we talk about is the concept of the 100 80 100 rule which is 100% pay, 80% time provided we get 100% productivity.

Now for some companies that equates to a 4 day week, but in some other businesses it might be say taking a couple of afternoons off a week or maybe even you know compressed hours. But what we're trying to do is reduce the amount of time that we work but obviously not at the cost of output.

**Ian:** Mm. So tell me, I mean, erm, you know I'm sure that there are massive supporters as I'm fully aware all around the world, and there'll be naysayers but how did you actually give birth to this overarching concept of what the movement's all about and why did you do what you did a number of years ago that's kind of led into what it is and, er, obviously what we know as the 4 day work week today. What was the trigger?

**Andrew:** Well again I'm a very accidental evangelist for this in that I was trying to deal with a totally different question.

As any businessman does I was trying to work out how I could improve productivity in my company and I was sitting on a long distance flight to London and I was reading some back copies of the economist which is what I used to do and in the economist was a couple of articles about the fact that people were only productive for 2 and a half to 3 hours a day.

And I wondered first of all why, and secondly was that happening in my company? And I thought the why was quite interesting, it was talking about things like, you know, interruptions at work, it was talking about people being distracted attending too many meetings. And I started to think well actually that is happening in my company, so then I wondered was there a deal to be done



here? Could I go to my team and say look what would you do differently? So that we could deliver the same productivity. What would you do differently if I gifted you a day off a week?

And it was simple as that, I wasn't trying to create a better world, I wasn't thinking about work life balance. I was trying to work out a way to incentivise my staff to improve their productivity. So I'm slightly embarrassed to admit that actually.

**Ian:** Happy consequences, huh, happy consequences. What is it, there's a saying that, erm, innovation at its core is just finding new ways of solving old problems, right?

**Andrew:** Well absolutely, yes.

**Ian:** Mm, mm. And if you go back to, erm, I remember in a previous conversation with you and you were talking about this whole 5 day working week construct, was born out of obviously a golden era in the industrial revolution, so, erm, you know, it's an interesting story that one. Do you want to kind of share that with our listeners.

**Andrew:** Yeah yeah absolutely because I mean Henry Ford is credited with the 5 day work week, erm, and when you actually scratch the surface of why Henry Ford did it, actually he wanted to create a market for his cars and he worked out that if, you know, you were working 6 days a week, on the 7th day you went to church and that wasn't really a need to use a car.

So if you gave an extra day off then there was a bit of free time and once you had free time then you might think well we might go to the beach or we might go to town. And for that, if you're gonna take the family you needed a car so in many ways what Henry Ford was doing was no different from me.

I mean I was trying to improve productivity, he was trying to make a market and he worked out that working 5 days would make a market. So that has I think very interesting connotations for what we do today, because if we did the same thing in an era of service industries, reduce the amount of time that we work, there is every chance and indeed a lot of the evidence does suggest, that there's every chance that we'd actually increase economic activity.

Because you get your business bit done in 4 days and then in that extra day off you go and do other things and that would obviously, you know, drive other businesses. So I, I think this concept is sort of the same, there's nothing new under the sun is there?

**Ian:** No hahaha, this is true. This is true. Erm, I do I do feel though that the way that, erm, the ideation, your own self experiment at an organisational level when you first introduced this, erm, into your business to where it is today, erm, you know, this kind of whole concept of the oh shit moment, the kind of pinch yourself moment that actually, we're onto something here.



Was there ever a moment, has there ever been or do you think there might be, erm, a time when you can actually sit there and go wow I did not expect this to be where it is today.

**Andrew:** Well to be honest with you I think there are a couple of moments, erm, the first one was very very early on and that was when we announced that this is what we were gonna do and we got absolutely deluged by international media. And deluge is the right word. We stopped counting at about 12,000 articles, and that covers print, radio, erm, television.

And when we announced the results of our trial and then we announced we were going public it gained again, only bigger, and we could watch this, go round the world. You would have different media stations would pick up the story and then it would be picked up in another time zone and another time zone.

And that, you know, that was quite extraordinary I mean you never expected, I almost say you know you've made it when you're on drive time Colombian radio, right.

**Ian:** Hahaha

**Andrew:** Erm, you know

**Ian:** Ok, yeah

**Andrew:** But the true pinch me moment was my partner Charlotte and I were driving the peek into Paris car rally and we were in Siberia and and the phone rang in the car and our guys in New Zealand said do you realise you've just been name checked by the Prime Minister of Russia who said that he's seen the 4 day week and he thinks that Perpetual Guardians' experiment is the future for Russia.

And we thought well wow, that's that's, you know pretty cool. Put the phone down. The phone rings again and they said where are you and we said well we're in Siberia and we're heading to this town, you know, far east Siberia. The the phone picks back up again and they said look there's gonna be camera crews from Moscow television waiting to interview you.

We were late, we got stuck, I was covered in oil I did three back to back tv interviews for Moscow television. And we thought well that's a big thing but when we left Russia they announced that the Parliament are starting to address legislation.

**Ian:** Yeah, erm, it's incredible

**Andrew:** Now, yeah yeah, there have been many pinch me moments since but that one, that one was the first time I think that we, back in 2019, that was the first one at which we thought hang on. Actually this is bigger than, bigger than what we started we thought we would get one article in the New Zealand Herald and maybe a, a clip on our morning tv and that's no big deal that's about 40,000 viewers.



That's what we thought we were gonna get but suddenly this thing was global and it wasn't just global it was starting to change lives. And change attitudes and we thought that was the point at which you sit back and you go you know, you don't get many chances to change the world.

**Ian:** No absolutely right, absolutely right. And you know, I, I wanna dig into that a bit later on but for listeners out there that, erm, have kind of teetered around the edge of wanting to do a trial, give it a go, understand what it all means.

How do you get ready, who do you need to kind of influence internally. Like, tell us a little bit about how an organisation would start something like this.

**Andrew:** Well look the world has changed enormously I think from where we were 4 years ago. What we did right at the beginning is that we decided that we were going to share everything that we had ever done and we put out all our material up on websites.

It was one of those great flukey things right at the start that we actually also had researched alongside our trial. We weren't just producing an opinion, we had objective research that showed what had actually happened in the company.

**Ian:** Yeah yeah validation

**Andrew:** Yeah yeah, so we created this organisation called 4 Day Week Global and again a very accidental exercise in that we started getting thousands of companies phoning us up and saying how did you do this? So that led to the organisation, the book, but, but, what we then decided was that you know, it's a very lonely step for senior executives to make the decision to actually implement some sort of 4 day week.

So what we created was a series of pilot programmes and we run these now in, in Ireland, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK, South Africa. We've got them coming up in Portugal and Spain and the idea around them is that we bring together a whole group of companies who think that they wanna try a 4 day week.

What we then do is we, we brief them on all the lessons that we've learned, erm, we bring in mentors, we bring in some specialists. We buddy each company up with a company that's done it before and what we try and do is we try and make it safe for an organisation to experiment.

Now alongside that we bring in our global research teams so we are running a global research programme coordinated out of Boston college in Massachusetts, got Oxford and Cambridge universities from the UK involved, as well as in each country we have a local university that would partner and provide the local research.

So what that means is that you now can A justify to your stakeholders that this isn't a crazy idea, it's a very structured experiment. There are going to be lots of



objective, erm, bits of data that you can share to show what the impact on the company is. But also now of course you can point to the thousands of companies around the world that have already implemented a 4 day week and what their experience has been. It's not you know these mad kiwis in 2018 going I know let's just work 4 days a week, erm

**Ian:** Hahaha

**Andrew:** Which, you know, I mean we were right up there with hobbits at that point.

**Ian:** Hahaha

**Andrew:** If, if you get what I mean, you know, so this is now far more than that. This is very structured and I think I would like to say that this is now a very sensible rational business argument because the evidence suggests that productivity doesn't remain flat. The productivity actually goes up between, you know, 15 to 20 to 30 percent depending on circumstances.

**Ian:** Yeah, and and do you think that, erm, the naysayer or the road blocks that do typically come up are ones that are relatively straightforward based on the fact that you've got evidence and research backed and insights and that kind of network if you will, that kind of movement that wraps around it that gives it such a stronger sense of validation. That that fear of change can really heavily influence a bit of an old school mentality around this is just an opportunity that's for people to work less.

**Andrew:** I'd like to say yes but I'm gonna say no. And I think the reason for that is that the, the naysayer, the, the the, most regular statement is well it might work in X but it wouldn't work in my business because

**Ian:** Yeah

**Andrew:** You know, that's based on pretty deep rooted prejudices. We have been conditioned I think as a leadership generation, a few generations, that working longer is working harder. And to change that requires quite a leap of faith especially if you've spent, you know, god knows how many years following that orthodox. So, you know, it, I can understand why it is very difficult for some business leaders to change that

**Ian:** Mm

**Andrew:** And the other thing of course is that there's the what's in it for me issue. In that, let's be clear, erm, it's pretty good as it is at the moment, why would I, why would I run the risk of making my people work less and then finding that it doesn't work. And I'm gonna be, you know, on the receiving end of that. So this is very much something, what's why making it safe have to be such an important part of the whole thing.



**Ian:** Mm, mm. Is there a couple of things that you could talk to, you know what a success of the movement might be. I'm aware from some of our background research that a number of governments around the world are looking into this, looking to introduce it into public sector and things. Are there those types of trials that are happening overseas that you could talk to? That may offer some kind of insights?

**Andrew:** Well first of all, the first trial, the bigger, sort of, the private enterprise trials are the ones that we're running around the world. The largest of these is obviously is, is the, UK trial with over 70 companies in it.

Now, the, the formal results from those trials have not yet come out but there was data that came out from the halfway point in the UK trial. And that we can share, at, at this point in time. Now that had something like, you know, 49 50 percent of the participants were saying that productivity had actually gone up.

**Ian:** Mm hm

**Andrew:** The majority, I mean, the absolute majority of participants have, you know, productivity flat to up. We're talking in the 90s. But what's very interesting is that again the majority have, vast majority, were all saying that they're seeing benefits as far as their business was concerned and the vast majority at the halfway point were signalling that they were gonna keep it.

Now for, for that good evidence from a fairly wide ranging trial, there are lots and lots of other individual organisations that have done this and, and have announced the results themselves so they've been operating you know on their own. I think one of the most high profile recently was Atom Bank in the UK.

**Ian:** Yeah

**Andrew:** Which, you know, experimented with it and probably the first financial institution in the UK to try it and has come out unequivocally saying that they not only are retaining it but just how successful it actually has been. And they're very strong advocates for this. So I am not aware really other than one or two that I've heard, that we've come across, the vast majority of organisations that have attempted to do this have seen better results and are sticking with it.

**Ian:** Mm

**Andrew:** What's now happening is there's a bit of a shift that I think has occurred over the last two to three years and partly driven by the pandemic, because in some ways the pandemic removed two of the barriers.

**Ian:** Yes

**Andrew:** One was can I trust my staff, well when you're not in the office you had to trust them, and secondly how do I measure productivity? And if they're not in the office and you were using time as a surrogate, you had to find a different way to do that. But now you've got this whole great resignation issue. And now when



we're talking especially in companies in the United States, they are saying that the primary reason they are looking at a 4 day week is now about the attraction and retention of staff.

**Ian:** Mm, that's interesting

**Andrew:** Yeah, and then, then, what you're seeing now, now this is where countries are starting to get involved. Because it's no longer just about me trying to get people into my company, it's how do I get people into my country.

**Ian:** Yes, yeah

**Andrew:** So suddenly this is where, you know, Lithuania, Romania, Belgium, er, in Europe for example have all passed some sort of legislation. Um, you're seeing some legislations trying to reduce the working week passed in Japan, India, India, has passed a legislation around 4 day week. Not reduced hours yet but reduced days. Um, you're starting to see this pick up, you've got legislation has been put forward in the United States.

There's a private members bill coming up in the UK, it was in the Labour manifesto the first time round, it's coming in, in, all over the place of suddenly politicians starting to go you know what, and the latest of course would be the state of Victoria in Australia. With, you know, Premier Andrews sitting there saying well if he gets re-elected he will look to bring in a 4 day week. And I think that's unashamedly being brought in to try to attract workers to Victoria at the expense of every other state.

**Ian:** Mm

**Andrew:** Now, you know, we'll see if it happens but I think, I think that's where this is going now.

**Ian:** Mm, well, er and that's a really nice lead onto where my mind was going. It's, you know, we've spoken about the accidental movement that you've created that's changing governments and workplaces and communities and just individuals' lives.

Erm we've we've touched on the pinch yourself holy shit moments, we've spoken about what is becoming essentially a democratisation and a broader acceptance of a 4 a 4 day work week. What's next?

Like have you actually, rather than it being a happy consequence of just keep doing what you're doing, have you actually now taken a step back and said actually, this thing, let's put it on steroids, we expect it to be X in, you know, time. Have you created a bit of a longer term broader vision for this now?

**Andrew:** Um, well the problem with that is that every time you have a longer term broader vision it gets overtaken by events.

**Ian:** Hahaha



**Andrew:** I mean, you know, erm, so

**Ian:** Like podcasts

**Andrew:** Like podcasts, I mean, I, I, I would, er, you know when somebody asked me this right at the start and I said well maybe in ten years we'll see it becoming a bit more mainstream. And now here we are 4 years and one pandemic later, erm, it, it's not necessarily mainstream as in practice but it's mainstream as regards debate. It's been debated at the world economic forum, erm, it's been debated at the european economic forum, erm, there are very clearly now, you know, government after government saying how they are gonna re think this.

So if I came up with a forecast or view on steroids I don't know where this will actually go. Seriously I mean we've got congressman Takano has put a bill into congress to reduce the American work week. Now, nowhere in my long term plan would I have ever expected the Americans would be

**Ian:** Hahaha yeah

**Andrew:** Would be thinking about possibly putting a reduced work week. We've now got ten staff erm working in 4 day week global around the world, we've got all of these pilot programmes going. Um, to be clear though we fund what we do ourselves or out of, you know, very very small fees that we charge companies to come onto the programme so we can cover our costs.

If I was to supercharge this I will have to re think how we do that. I mean we are talented amateurs I think is probably the best description, erm, because it's you know if we were, if we were McKinsey or we were Deloitte, there would be piles of resources behind this and there sort of is, there is Charlotte and I erm and, and a very small but very talented team of people who I guess, I mean we're the rebel alliance right that's probably the best way to look at it.

You know, out there is the er, the Imperial stormtroopers arguing like hell that they're going to er going to keep on with a 5 day week and we're sort of with those little dodgy looking Millennium Falcon thing whipping around the universe sniping away at the edges.

Now at some point, and I think very soon, this will actually explode. I mean you used this word, it's the democratisation of this. And and what is now happening is that groups of people in different countries, and the latest that's come on this journey with us is a is a talented team from South Africa who are saying actually we wanna be part of this. We want to change our country for the better.

And so that I think is the point where this goes on steroids, that's when, you know, groups of people in different countries come together, use the concept the material we've done and the idea but actually structure it for their own country. And I think that's where this explodes.



Because know 80% of employees wherever they are in the world when asked say that they would like to work a 4 day week. And that's a very strong pull factor so what we've got to do now is provide, you know like the touch paper, we're mixing metaphors, but like that touch paper in each country and you know sooner rather than later I think this shift will occur.

You know, it didn't take long for Henry Ford's idea to be picked up and and translated around the world, maybe took a decade and a bit. But you know that's not bad.

**Ian:** Mm, that's not bad

**Andrew:** You know in terms of changing the world.

**Ian:** Well for something that's been, um, an accidental happy consequence to now we're having this conversation on the 1st November 2022, talking about changing countries' governance. That's, that's not bad. That's not bad.

**Andrew:** Yeah it's almost 4 years to the day in fact, thinking about it. I, I think we initiated the programme permanently in the company on the 1st November, erm, you know 2018 so there you go.

**Ian:** Happy anniversary haha

**Andrew:** Well yeah, erm, it's er, it's extraordinary right. You're right we are, we are seeing something but I think let's be clear, we haven't changed the way we have worked for 100 years.

**Ian:** Mm, mm

**Andrew:** We have hung onto this construct of the 40 hour week with, you know, significant demographic changes. You know, families have to have both parents working, they didn't you know 100 years ago.

**Ian:** Yeah, yeah that's right.

**Andrew:** We have to rebalance how we do things. And, and we know that productivity has increased materially in, you know, recent decades. And the benefits of that have generally gone to corporates as opposed to individuals.

So one of the things here is, is about readdressing the balance but recognising that everybody has to win for this, you know there is no free lunch. You can't just drive down productivity and give people more free time, you know that isn't gonna work. Cos as a consequence the organisation will look to, to rebalance its staffing.

Whereas what we want to do is we want to say look this is about you know giving people the time to be the best they can be at work, but the best they can be at home. And if you get that right, you know, who'd have thought healthier happier,



more engaged, more at rested, employees are more productive. I mean that's a crazy idea isn't it.

**Ian:** Ah, goodness me I mean who'd have thought it absolutely haha

**Andrew:** Absolutely, erm, hahaha it's a drop the mic moment that is

**Ian:** Yeah it, it is, it is, and it's a really nice kinda way to draw our conversation into somewhat of a close, you know, as we've discovered before you and I could talk for quite some time.

**Andrew:** Hahaha

**Ian:** erm, I, I'm always fascinated when I have a discussion with you. But, erm, at Talent we have a vision which is empowering people to build a better world of work for all. That real inclusive for all component is really important. Given what you're doing and what your organisation is doing, what does a better world of work look like to you?

**Andrew:** Well now you see that is very dangerous because we could go on for hours on this too.

**Ian:** Hahaha

**Andrew:** Look I am, I'm I unashamedly hate gig.

**Ian:** Mm

**Andrew:** I totally, I hate it, I hate it because I think that all too often in these type of contracts are introduced to arbitrage things that we as society have generally said are unalien for sick pay, for holiday pay, minimum wage, to invest in our people to equip them, you know, to be better employees and to be better citizens.

And I think when you look at things like gig, and that doesn't happen and usually you end up with those rights either not there or just ignored. Now why that's relevant is because funnily enough the 4 day week for me is about trying to deliver the flexibility that gig promised, work when you want, with the benefits of structured employment

**Ian:** Mm

**Andrew:** Where those basic rights are delivered. But at the same time there is that prospect, you know for growth.

**Ian:** Yep

**Andrew:** I don't like this idea that convenience trumps everything else. That, you know, I just need to get it cheaper. And I think we have a world where we want



two things, we seem to want cheaper and we seem to want more. I don't want cheaper or more, I want better.

**Ian:** Yes, yes

**Andrew:** And that's where this for me goes. I want a world where people have got the time to spend with their families, to have those, share those care responsibilities.

I want an employment world where people don't get prejudiced by spending time with their families, whether they're male or female but that doesn't stop you climbing the ladder.

Do we always have to have the people at the very top be the people who've sacrificed absolutely everything to get there? And consequently their view of the world is often quite skewed I think.

**Ian:** Mmhm

**Andrew:** And I don't care whether you're a corporate leader or a politician, it ends up with exactly the same thing. So what I would like to have if you will, this is the revenge of the common man and woman.

**Ian:** Hahaha

**Andrew:** This is the opportunity for real people to have great careers, meaningful careers, but at the same time meaningful lives.

**Ian:** Mm

**Andrew:** And if we could do that, you know, that is a legacy that I would love to be known for that more than anything else.

**Ian:** Absolutely, absolutely. Wonderful, and and what a legacy it would be, a hundred percent. Erm, a hundred percent. I am gonna say thank you very very much Andrew Barnes, it's been an absolute pleasure erm speaking to you today.

As always, um, for those people who want to learn more understand more about what it is that you're doing, where can we direct people so as they can come and check it out and learn a little bit more for our listener base. Where would they come to Andrew?

**Andrew:** Well three places, go to the website, [www.4dayweek.com](http://www.4dayweek.com). There's piles of stuff on there. There's also just been released a LinkedIn learning course which talks through how to structure a pilot.

And if you're really, you know, glutton for punishment you can buy the book or real glutton for punishment listen to it on Audible and I did the recording so I can drone at you for hours. Erm, and that's probably the best way to go.



**Ian:** That's excellent, that's excellent. There's no droning at all it's just utter fascination and erm, an education and all I always walk away wanting more and always learning something. Andrew er thank you so much for your time, I really really appreciate it and thank you for joining us today. On our better world of work podcast thank you

**Andrew:** Thanks Ian

**Ian:** Thanks very much

