4 Outdated Rules Every Business Owner Needs to Ditch

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Whether you like it or not, things have changed. The traditional "rules" of work simply don't apply to a majority of jobs anymore, and that can be a hard truth to hear. Many of us are already overwhelmed with the sheer volume of tough decisions, changes, and new responsibilities we have to juggle, but — in order to do what's best for our businesses — it's critical to take a hard look at how things used to be, what's changed since then, and, most important, how we must respond to those changes.

Old Rule: Traditional office hours New Rule: Active hours

For many industries, the introduction of remote work created a major shake-up that, if we're honest, not everyone was completely prepared for. However, as working from home continues to change how we do business, it's important for us employers to realize that we can't change the entire work format and enforce the same rules. "This is how we've always done it" is irrelevant. Circumstances have changed, and it's time for business owners to adapt.

Sorry folks, but the traditional Monday-through-Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule is officially dead, and it's time for business owners to make the leap. Instead of keeping with an outdated format that, let's be honest, was never actually

great for productivity, don’t be afraid to rethink things.

Replace your traditional work hours with predefined “active hours” that work for you, your employees, and your business. That might be 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. every day (or some other chunk of time that makes sense), and encourage your employees to be available and/or on call during these hours.

Don’t forget to ask your employees for input on what works best for them — and it doesn’t necessarily need to be the same active hours for each employee each day of the week. Whether they’re working from 5 a.m. to 7 a.m., 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., or 8 p.m. to 11 p.m., *when* they’re working matters significantly less than whether or not the work is getting done.

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Old Rule: Standard 40-hour work week
New Rule: Flexible scheduling

I love reminding people that the eight-hour workday is over 200 years old. Robert Owens, a Welsh labor rights activist, is credited with coining the phrase “Eight hours labor, eight hours recreation, eight hours rest” back in 1817, and it’s a concept that quickly made its way to America. By the early 1920s, the idea of the eight-hour workday hit the mainstream, and we’ve relied on that structure ever since.

Obviously, a lot of things have changed over the last two hundred years — so why are we still clinging to a concept that is literally centuries old? Research proves that shorter workdays (and shorter work weeks) are both fantastic ways to improve both quality of life *and* quality of work for your employees. We know that employees who are happier (and more productive) help improve the bottom line, so why aren’t we

making the switch?

As a business owner, you need to take a critical look at whether or not the eight-hour workday *actually* works for your business. Resist the urge to make decisions based on what you're comfortable with. You might love the eight-hour workday because it makes it easier for you to keep tabs on your employees – but that doesn't necessarily mean it's best for your business. Instead, maybe you need to focus on hiring employees you trust so you don't *need* to keep tabs on them every single day.

Studies show that employees work better in concentrated periods – and when they're in control of their own schedules – and boosting your employees' well-being pays off. Businesses that introduce more flexibility into their work week can see increases in productivity, employee health and wellness, *and* profitability. Clinging to a rigid work schedule might be hurting your bottom line more than it's helping your peace of mind.

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Old Rule: Too much (or too little) oversight
New Rule: Accountability

One of the reasons why many business owners resist introducing flexible schedules or work-from-home options is because they're worried it's going to be difficult to oversee employees if they aren't in the office or logged in at the same time.

While these new ways of doing work can require a fair amount of trust in your employees to *actually* get things done instead of watching Netflix on the company dime, it's all about

creating a structure where you get what you need while allowing your employees to thrive. Accountability is critical, and it allows your employees to have a clear understanding of responsibilities and expectations, giving them the freedom to flourish in a nontraditional work environment while creating enough structure for you to make sure work is being accomplished.

Unfortunately, if you don't know what your employees are up to on a daily basis, that's not always a "them" problem. If your employees don't have clear expectations of what they should be doing (and how they should be doing it), it's harder for them to give you the reassurance you need that things are getting done.

Instead of being disconnected from your team — or, on the opposite end, becoming a dreaded micromanager — try to be a touch point, not a bottleneck. Want to keep your team on track? Establish a few key metrics, and then introduce weekly check-ins where employees can tell you the top three items they're working on that week. You can do a quick check-in throughout the week via Slack or email, but, for the most part, it's about learning to trust the people you've hired to do great work.

Related: Leading By Accountability Is Contagious

Old Rule: Be a good manager
New Rule: Be a great leader

When it comes to being a business owner, one of the most important things you can learn is the difference between a manager and a leader. Anyone can manage a team (with varying degrees of success), but it involves a lot of time, energy, and effort that you probably don't have at your disposal right now.

Instead of viewing your role as if you're managing a team of employees, focus on learning how to be a fantastic leader as well. Be creative and flexible. Instead of pointing fingers at your employees (or the pandemic), learn how to be proactive instead of reactive. What can you do better as a leader? Where can your team improve? Learn how to empower your team to function autonomously and at a high level.

Remember, this isn't just about doing what's best or most comfortable for you. It takes practice, but eventually you'll find a solution that's best for your customers, your employees *and* your bottom line.

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