

# How We Serve Our Customers While Working a 4-Day Work Week

As with the rest of the Buffer team, our Advocacy team was thrilled when we first experimented with a four-day work week in May 2020. Unique to this team, though, was a bit of wariness around the success of a four-day work week for a customer-facing team.

As a company, Buffer has always had a high bar for customer support. We aim to provide fast, personal, and informed customer support responses 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We also assign one Advocate to every ticket so that each customer gets a sense of continuity with us. The thing about Advocacy is that even if we are working one less day per week, the incoming ticket volume remains mostly unchanged.

So how do we aim to set the bar high when we're working four-day work weeks?

We've tried several different setups and are quite happy with where we've landed. Here's exactly the system we currently use to make a four-day work week work for our Customer Advocacy team, along with a transparent look at our team goals and metrics from the last year of working a four-day work week.

## How Advocacy is set up for a 4-day work week

Over the years, the Advocacy team has done a few different rounds of summer Fridays, where our teammates took half-days

on Fridays for a month in the summer. We learned quite a lot from those, so we already had a framework for what the challenges and opportunities would be as we entered into the four-day work week.

In general, a shorter work week is a great opportunity for the Advocacy team to learn and grow in several areas:

- **Communication:** With a four-day work week, we have to have excellent communication with a key focus on asynchronous communication.
- **Knowledge management:** We already put a lot of effort into how we share knowledge and document our processes, and this is another chance to improve how we do so.
- **Experimenting with time management:** It's a chance to explore how we can work more efficiently each day, and how we can better manage our energy.
- **Setting individual goals:** This was a great opportunity to rethink individual goals and give the team clear objectives to work towards.

## **Where we started with the four-day work week**

When the whole Buffer team first started working four-day work weeks, we gave each team at Buffer the freedom to choose the day of the week to take off. The whole company mostly fell into two camps: Wednesdays or Fridays.

We already knew that choosing a consistent day each week wouldn't work for us on the Advocacy team because we need to be available seven days a week for our customers. Any day that we have no Advocates working, ticket volume builds up, and customers don't get responses. There's also a chance we miss a bug or issue with the Buffer product that comes through the inbox.

From the get-go, we knew we would need a variety of days off for different team members. Initially, we rotated days off, so teammates were off on a different day every week, but there

were always some teammates online. We did this for the first month, and it wasn't a popular option. First, there was far too much admin work involved to set up this schedule; second, it was tricky for Advocates to plan anything when the day they were offline was continually rotating.

### **The system that works for our team**

The schedule we have now is the schedule we landed on in July 2020, three months into us adopting the four-day work week. We asked team members for their preferences for a day off, and we try to follow that as much as possible. Most folks opted to have Friday off, some prefer Monday off, and a smaller group takes off Wednesdays. Now, it's consistent every week, so we know exactly who will be online each day of the week.

An important part of this system for us was building it to optimize for most folks on the team to be able to take three days off in a row. This work structure – four days on, three days off – can be really replenishing, and we wanted that for our team members.

Also, it can get tricky to have an ongoing conversation with a customer if you're off one random day in the middle of the week. We built the schedule with that in mind, though we have a few team members who find value in taking Wednesdays off and we support that. For the majority of the team, though, it's Monday or Friday off.

### **How we manage weekends**

As you can see in the above chart, we have customer support coverage on the weekends as well. That's something we've done since the early days of Buffer, and we hire a few people specifically for weekend shifts. By default, they work one of the weekend days and not both, so they have one weekend day off. The exception is that one teammate prefers to work Friday to Monday and have Tuesday to Thursday off.

For those taking weekend shifts, we still optimize for having three days off in a row to maintain the benefits of that added rest and maintaining flows for communicating with customers.

## **Goals and metrics and the 4-day work week**

In general, we set goals and measure our incoming volume across seven days instead of the four that each teammate is working. The challenge for us is making sure that, collectively, we are as productive across those seven days with this new schedule. Honestly, we struggled in the first six months with this; we did the best that we could, but we didn't have clear goals and we weren't able to have clear expectations for increased productivity.

This year, we've been much more clear with our goals, specifically around ticket-number targets to hit within four days. That clarity means that teammates can hit our response time goals and continue to work a four-day work week. As with other teams at Buffer, Advocates also have the option to work a partial or full fifth day of the week if they feel they haven't been able to achieve what they set out to do in a given week. We call that fifth day an "overflow day."

### **A look at our goals and how they've evolved**

Our two main goals for the Advocacy team have always been our response time to customers and individual ticket goals (how many tickets an Advocate gets through in a day). These goals were based on what we thought were realistic targets for the team and for the level of each individual.

In Q1 of 2020 (before we were working a four-day work week), our goal was to respond to customer emails within six hours. We also had individual ticket goals that were based on daily volume. When we moved to four-day work weeks in Q2 of 2020, we

implemented new targets for tickets per day, but we didn't tie these to the customer experience we wanted to provide or set these based on achieving the same output in four days instead of five.

We ended up evolving our business hours for offering customer support. At the beginning of our 4-day work week experiment, our business hours were Mondays at 3 am ET through Fridays at 8 pm ET – i.e. 24 hours a day during the work week. To create more consistent expectations for our customers, we changed our hours to be 6 am to 8 pm ET each day, Monday through Friday.

Now in 2021, we've set ambitious company and team-level OKRs (objectives and key results) around customer response times and overall service experience. It's important to us that we don't sacrifice customer experience for efficiency. We've aimed for a two-hour first response time, and subsequent replies sent within seven hours (for email tickets).

### **A few results so far in Q1 2021:**

- Our customer satisfaction score went from 92.3% in Q4 2020 to 94% this quarter.
- We hit our goal of a two-hour first response time, with a median of 1.6 hours during business hours.
- Our team sent 71% of second responses within seven hours (our goal was 90%).

We have also standardized our team targets for ticket replies sent per week (148-170 tickets) and ticket quality we expect from each individual. These goals ensure a level of output we need to achieve our objectives while being able to take that fifth day off.

## **Parting thoughts**

We are proud that we've been able to improve our customer response times and experience in 2021 while working a four-day

work week. Even with that, we know there is still room to evolve what a four-day work week looks like for our team.

The reduction of hours available across a global team means we're at times a bit short of hands when we're impacted by external factors such as third-party downtime or issues with APIs. Whilst we might be able to get the same amount of tickets done in four days as five, there is always going to be value in being available on specific days and times within the world of customer support.

As a team, we're continuing to discuss how we can embrace a bit more flexibility around coverage in our strategy for the future.

Do you work on a customer support team that has four-day work weeks? Or do you have more questions about how we approach a four-day work week? Drop us a tweet! You may just hear from one of our Customer Advocates.

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