



# How to be a GREAT Employer during a Pandemic

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## How to be a Great Employer

Goffee and Jones published an article in the Harvard Review in 2013, which is still relevant today and stated that; “People want to do good work – to feel they matter in an organisation that makes a difference. They want to work in a place that magnifies their strengths, not their weaknesses. For that, they need some autonomy and structure, and the organisation must be coherent, honest, and open”.

It’s important that businesses, large and small, try to make the workplace as positive and as productive an environment as possible. Goffee and Jones offer six common sense principles that will help you assess your workplace with a view to making it a more productive and rewarding environment which we will discuss in a bit more detail.

Interestingly, these six principles have nothing to do with pay and benefits, how fancy your office is or your HR policies and checklists! Great coming from an HR expert right? However, I’ve been saying the same things since I started in HR over 20 years. HR should be about creating great workplaces. Us Humans haven’t changed much, and we all have pretty much the same fundamental needs from our workplaces. We want to be able to trust our business leader and their management team, and we want to be treated with respect and treated fairly.

The Great Place to Work list is published annually, and it looks at how employees view their employers, and every year, without fail, what employees say they want and need remains consistent with the Goffee and Jones principles; if staff believe their leaders to be credible, respectful, and fair, they trust them. When your employees trust you, they take pride in what they do, and share a sense of camaraderie with co-workers.

A great book to read if you want to more on this topic is by Jennifer Robin and Michael Burchell; “The Great Workplace, How to Build It, How to Keep It and Why It Matters”. They explain how leaders and managers need to create and reinforce core values of trust, pride, and camaraderie with every communication, every decision, and every interaction they have with their employees.

Think about how much time we spend in the workplace and how important job satisfaction is. Most of us spend about a third of our life at work (counting the time thinking about or worrying about work). A good workplace provides a sense of purpose, achievement, and a source of social connection – it can enrich our lives. A bad workplace can become a nightmare, leading to stress, depression, and dissatisfaction.

If your organisation has strong core values, based on integrity, not just an HR manual, these values will be reflected in the daily work and attitudes of your employees. Goffee and Jones suggest that you “think not about how much value to extract from workers but about how much value to instil in them”. In short, it’s up to you if you are in a leadership or management role, to set an example and

consciously design an inclusive and appreciative work environment, or go about changing your environment with someone like Meraki HR, if its not what you want for your business.

A simple way to think about your culture is to think of it as “the way we do things around here.” Your culture will be created in part by your people policies and practices. With everything that’s happened in the last few months, how you have treated your staff with regards to homeworking, redundancies, recruitment and induction, employee development and furloughed workers, will all have had an impact on how your employees felt about you as their employer. Do they trust you, have you treated them with respect, have you been honest with them about how the business is doing?

Now, let’s look at the core principles of Goffee and Jones , slightly modified by me and my experiences in a bit more detail as there are some simple things you can do around each of these that will help you to be a great employer – even during a Pandemic!

### 1. Allow people to be themselves

When companies try to accommodate differences, they often confine themselves to traditional diversity categories such as gender, race, age, ethnicity. These efforts are important but allowing people to be themselves is a little more subtle. This is about encouraging people with a different perspective, habits of mind, and core assumptions. So for example, the conservative financial services company that embraces the IT employee in shorts and sandals, or the hipster organisation that doesn’t look aghast when someone comes into work wearing a suit. Or the place where nearly everyone comes in at odd hours but accommodates the one or two people who prefer a 9-to-5 schedule. That’s allowing people to be themselves and can you honestly say that you do that?

### 2. Unleash the flow of information

The organisation of your dreams tells the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth to it’s employees, warts and all, and never has this been more necessary than the last few months and the Coronavirus. Business owners have had to tell their employees about their difficult financial situations and the difficult decisions it has had to make. But guess what? My experience of being honest with people whether that’s about the state of the business, or the state of their behaviour or performance, or a mistake someone or the business has made, is that people may not like what you have to say, but they will respect your honesty, as difficult as that has been to deliver.

In the age of Facebook, Twitter, and Glassdoor, you’re better off telling people the truth before someone else does! Employees’ need to know what’s really going on so that they can do their jobs, particularly in volatile environments like the current

situation we are in, where it's already difficult to keep everyone aligned and where workers at all levels are being asked to work and think differently.

Radical honesty is not easy to implement. It requires courage and effective communication skills and emotional intelligence. Are you brave enough for this?

### 3. Magnify People's Strengths

People have strengths and those strengths will always be their strengths. They will also have areas that they are not so good at, and while they can learn and improve these skills, they will never be what they excel at. So if you are looking for someone highly organised with good attention to detail, and you have interviewed someone whose attention to detail was poor during the interview process, you can improve upon this, but it's unlikely to ever be their strength, so don't try and make them be something they are not!

The ideal company makes its best employees even better - better than they ever thought they could be". When times are good and when competition for talent is fierce, it's easy to see that the benefits of developing existing staff outweigh the costs of finding new workers. However, when times are tough, and you need to invest wisely, investing in developing your people's strengths is still the way to go! Don't waste your money trying to improve upon a skill they don't have. Invest in people's strengths to make them even better than they currently are, which is bound to have a positive impact on them and the people they work with.

But make sure that you are not one of those companies that grumble about losing their investment when people leave you for their next promotion. Be proud that you have created a business where people have flourished and grown and are ready to take their next step, after all, you may not be able to provide them with that next move. They may leave you and learn new skills and gain different experiences and want to come back to you, so think about how your business may benefit then?

### 4. Stand for more than shareholder value

People want to be a part of something bigger than themselves, something they can believe in. I've personally heard this time and time again over my 20 years in HR and have recently heard from an employee exit interview that the reason they were leaving the business they were in was that they ***"wanted to work in an organisation where I can really feel where the company comes from and what it stands for so that I believe in what they are doing and I feel I have a role that contributes to that"***

This isn't about a mission statement—it's about forging and maintaining powerful connections between personal and organisational purpose and values. When you do that, you foster individuality and create a strong culture at the same time.

Certain companies may be seen to have an inherent advantage in this area. For example, a local company who makes insulin pens, save lives every day. Engineers

who design the side bars for Oxford BMW's mini have been known to wake up at 4:00 am to write down ideas that will make the cars safer.

You need to think about what your purpose is and why you do what you do and how each of your employee's roles fits into that, to help them to feel part of your business and that their contribution is valuable.

### 5. Make work meaningful

In my experience, this is probably one of the hardest areas from an HR perspective to really bring to fruition. It requires nothing less than a deliberate reconsideration of the tasks each person in the business is performing. No mean feat and a significant amount of work if done properly. Do those duties make sense? Why are they what they are? Are they as engaging as they can be? This is a huge, complex undertaking.

A good example of this is John Lewis. In 2012 it completed a review of more than 2,200 jobs, slotting them within a hierarchy of 10 levels, to make it easier for employees to take advantage of opportunities across the business. This was a deliberate effort by John Lewis to match its people with the work they wanted to do.

### 6. Only have rules that people believe in

No one should be surprised that, for many people, the dream organisation is free of arbitrary rules – no one hates a stupid rule more than me, let me tell you! But the dream organisation doesn't get rid of all rules, because again, us humans actually like a few rules and some structure, especially if those rules make sense! For example Engineers who design building must follow procedures and tight quality controls, or a building will collapse.

As successful entrepreneurial businesses grow, they often come to believe that new, complicated processes will undermine their culture. But again, my experience has shown that make your rules or your processes with your people, not for them. They will come up with far better processes than you or your leadership team ever could, and they will make sense and they will believe in them.

### Summary

I know that no two businesses are alike, and that's why at Meraki HR we tailor our solutions to meet the needs of our clients, there is no one size fits all approach.

Work can be an energising and exciting place to be, or it can be alienating, exploitative, controlling. Despite the changes that we have seen recently in our working world, it is still possible to create a great business where people love to come to work and feel part of something bigger and feel valued. If you want to create your great place to work, why not give us a call and we can talk about how we can help you? <http://bit.ly/CallMerakiHR>.

## We are Meraki HR

We provide the perfect blend of practical and professional HR solutions that work for your business and for your bottom line.

Working with us will enable you to improve employee engagement, your culture, people processes and procedures, which in turn will help you to deliver your business goals. And we do it all with our special touch of 'meraki'.

Your people are your greatest business asset. Knowing how to recruit, manage, develop and retain them is key to your success.

To find out how we can help you, please contact us:



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Book a call with Emma

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