

BANISHING THE SUNDAY NIGHT BLUES

I have regularly blogged about the importance of having an environment where people can flourish and do their best work. This has resonated with many CEOs, People Leaders and Executives I have worked with and met over the years. Many of which have taken these learnings and successfully created environments where their teams can be their best. Despite this great ongoing focus, it's disappointing that the Sunday Night Blues persist. It's a recognised psychological condition and as a hashtag it trends across the globe on social media every weekend and reflects how society is feeling. With my passion for culture and creating a human environment I decided to set myself a personal challenge - to inspire people to banish the "Sunday Night Blues" by 2025.

I've begun with a survey, to collect information and understand why this is happening, and to identify a starting point. I had an enthusiastic response. Thank you to those of you that responded!

The Survey Results

Being in control of the working week: Over 40% of respondents said if they had control over how they worked on Monday morning, this would support them banishing the Sunday Night Blues. This was about broadening the definition of flexible working to include start times, the work they did, and the location they worked from on Monday morning. Having this control would result in people feeling less overwhelmed and ease the stress of returning to work after the weekend. Having some planning time for the week rather than going straight into progress updates and meetings were examples of how this would help people. For the rest of the week, people would feel more positive if they knew there was flexibility in their work week to fit in life chores/admin. This would allow people to really enjoy their weekends and start the working week refreshed and ready to do their best work.

The work itself: 25% of respondents said they would score a 10 if they were interested in the work they were doing, it matched their passions and played to their strengths. Having clear expectations and accountabilities, allowing individuals to know how they could be successful and agreeing the definition of their best work, contributes to banishing their Sunday Night Blues.

Purpose: Less than 10% of respondents cited the importance of purpose. But those that did indicated that working for an organisation that aligned with their values and seeing how their work contributed to achieving a stated purpose gave them a reason to get up on Monday and make an impact. That was really exciting and motivating!

Work environment: Working for a company with low morale, high employee turnover, a lot of disorganisation, with financial instability, an uninspiring manager, were all examples of why people didn't feel excited to return to work after the weekend. A few admitted they were in the wrong job. I hope that after admitting this they are now taking matters into their own hands to get to their perfect 10 role. Good luck, you know who you are! Over 70% of the survey respondents had a management role; their approach

to the Sunday Night Blues impacted others. As managers and leaders of organisations, what should we be doing to banish the Sunday Night Blues?

Work to a purpose: I have written before about the importance of purpose, and indeed, it is the number one characteristic of a 'Being Human' culture. Organisations and leaders have a duty to be clear about what the purpose of the organisation is and live the culture through everything they do. Their actions reflect the employer brand. Potential candidates have a responsibility to do their due diligence to check the environment is going to be one that supports them being their best, e.g. by asking questions about flexible working before accepting an offer. The bottom line is that purpose connects people. If the purpose is not there in the first place, it's likely the company won't connect with the people, so won't be banishing the Sunday Night Blues.

Manage work clearly: Managers, along with team members, need to be clear on what is expected and what success looks like. This is crucial for a number of reasons. If everyone is clear about what is expected from the start, individuals then have the freedom to deliver and to ask for help and support when they are not sure. Clear expectations and good support set people up to excel. Organisations that spend time on having clearly aligned articulated goals and success criteria that everyone understands and knows are creating the best environment for success.

Promote flexible working: An organisation with a clear purpose where everyone is facing in the same direction, with clearly defined goals can support a flexible environment. Flexible working goes wrong when the manager and the employees have different assumptions when it comes to expectations. Flexibility is about trust. Not having to 'clock in' by a certain time takes the pressure off needing to be present when it's not always driving an outcome. Golden rule: Cancel all 9 and 10am Monday team meetings. Give people time to prepare for the week when they get to the office. We are not machines, we are human and we need to adapt back into the working week to be productive.

Knowing when our teams work best and recognising we all have to be flexible to accommodate others, and for unplanned events is good management. Doing things by rote because it is a habit, is not. Get to know your people: Who you work with is important, but do you really know who you work with? Are there great friendships that could be made? Do you have something in common that you haven't explored?

Companies that spend the energy and invest in people coming together through community projects, clubs and just plain fun, are happier and more diverse. In the world of working virtually, having a reason to connect with the organisation in a different way is valuable for remote workers and people who come in everyday.

Develop and support your talent: Management is hard. Learning the ropes as a new manager is challenging. And even experienced managers and leaders struggle to support their teams through the constant change that every organisation is going through. Being a manager comes with the complexity of being responsible for others, as well as managing your own work. Organisations need to invest in developing and supporting their managers through training, coaching and by providing regular communication channels to share what is happening in the company. An inspired manager will do and be their best, and provide a framework for teams to work within, build trust, catch issues early by supporting

and developing the individuals they are managing. But it's very difficult to do all that without the proper support. What next? So how can you personally manage your Sunday Night Blues?

It's about identifying what you are in control of, and making the adjustments to get to your Sunday night (or another evening, depending on your work pattern) score of 10. You may be in the wrong job or an environment that means you are not being your best. If that's the case, get a plan together to make the changes you need so as to banish the Sunday Night Blues.

Here's how I am practicing what I preach: when I started a new job as Chief People Officer at Kantar. I didn't arrange Monday morning check in meetings. Instead, I use that time to plan my week and give time to team members to use in a way that is best for them.

I would be keen to hear your thoughts (you can email me on kirstinfurber@me.com) on how to banish the Sunday Night Blues. I am creating a library of ideas for people to utilise to help with beginning the week excited to make things happen, not dreading the daily grind! And to end, what could Sunday night look like? Imagine it's a Sunday evening. You are excited it's Monday tomorrow because over the weekend you had an idea that you want to test and put into practice. You don't spend time preparing for what you should do and say at work, and instead, know you can turn up and be yourself. We would leave the office/meeting with a spring in our step, excited to go home and share with our friends and family how our ideas and contributions were taken seriously, and our talent unleashed. Imagine the impact on your team, organisation, your country, the world?