ONENESS

We know the future of work is changing. Recently the business pages have been full of stories both about how robots and technology are going to change our jobs, and also how millennials are changing the nature of the workforce and how businesses think. One day, AI will take over the roles that people currently perform, and driverless cars will change our lives, but these changes are a long way off. Or are they?

The reality is we are changing how we work every day. It seems a natural time to reflect on this, what with the changing of the seasons and the inevitable feeling of 'newness' that the start of the school year evokes, even if you are no longer a student. As we resume our busy work schedules after our summer holidays, some of us might even be making conscious decisions to work in a different way, or find work that suits us better.

Our relationship with work is changing too. Technology has blurred the lines between work and home life. We can take a call from home or in the office, and no one will know the difference. We're no longer bound to our desks to get things done and this gives us the flexibility to leave early, go to the gym or out to dinner, and then still finish a project by the deadline. Gone are the days when we used to change out of our 'work clothes' and switch into 'home' from 'work' mode.

We are now our **oneself**.

It is proven; not being yourself costs. It costs you personally, companies' organisationally, and even the wider economy. Typically 137.3 million working days were lost due to sickness or injury in the UK every year.. Of those, mental health issues (including stress, depression, anxiety and serious conditions), resulted in 15.8 million days lost. At least some of this stress and anxiety, and the resulting sick days, are being brought on as a result of being unhappy at work.

Working in a way that doesn't agree with us, for an organisation that doesn't have a clear purpose, and doesn't allow us to work flexibly, or where we feel undervalued and unsupported can lead to us feeling physically and emotionally unwell.

As executives and managers who want to lead their teams to drive business growth through purposeful work, and create environments for our employees and colleagues where they feel that they can do their best work, it is essential that we remember the boundaries between our working and personal lives are becoming more blurred, and that this affects us. It also is essential for us to remember, both in our working and in our personal lives, that we are not machines and that we need to take time to recuperate.

And it's critical for us to remember that we aren't all the same, and different people recuperate in different ways. And thank goodness for that, for if we were all the same, life would be far less interesting than it is, and our economic woes would be far more profound than the effect of a few sick days. If we all

approached problems in the same ways over and over, where would new ideas and innovation come from?

To empower our teams to do their best work, and to build and maintain environments where this is possible, we must encourage and support everyone in an endeavour to **be their oneself**. How can we encourage this?

Be your oneself. We must lead by example. To encourage everyone within an organisation to be their oneselves, means you have to be your oneself too. If you are open, passionate and not afraid of being vulnerable or admitting you were wrong when things may not have gone quite according to plan, you give your team permission to do the same. Being your oneself takes up a lot less energy than trying to be someone you are not, and that energy can be put back into the business and you doing your best work.

Prioritise environment. Even if we aren't chained to our desks to get things done in the way we used to be, there's no denying that we spend a lot of time at work. So make the working environment (including the supporting technology) a priority. Investing in the tools to help you do your work better, faster and more efficiently, or just as important, more pleasurably, will help create a place your team can thrive in. You don't want to offer your employees an environment that's worse or much less comfortable than where they live – that will not encourage them to be their oneself. You want your employees to treat the work environment with respect like their home, and to treat colleagues with respect like friends or family.

We all get annoyed when our partners and friends look at their phone repeatedly throughout dinner or a face-to-face conversation, so try not to look at yours in meetings. Technology is important but so is letting people know you are paying attention to them! Some start-up companies have even put all of their eggs in one basket and live and work together. For a lot of us, this is probably a step too far, but it certainly speaks to the desire that people have to bridge their working and personal lives and live as their oneselves. For the rest of us, it's worth considering, your company's physical environment and the equipment your employee's take out of the office represent your Employer brand – will they want to be associated with it?

Leaders should help employees get to know their oneself. There are a plethora of management books, articles and courses on how to motivate and engage employees, but I believe they all boil down to a fundamental principle: the future of work is human and we will all do better by getting to know one another. Trust your employees to know what is best for them, rather than deciding what they should do, or what they need to know. But be there to help them navigate through all the information and options available to them to ensure they don't miss key opportunities. Instead of a manager/reportee relationship, in an environment where people can be their oneselves, it will be more like two friends advising and supporting each other.

Don't pretend the workplace is a bubble. We can't pretend that external factors don't affect us, and we can't always predict what will happen or how people will feel. Political events like the Brexit vote and the US presidential elections are obvious examples of this, and it is silly to think that people don't carry their personal views and emotions with them to work. So it is important to stay grounded and keep up to date

with the world outside of work and when pivotal events happen, it's essential that you listen to your team members about how they're feeling, not just about work, but about everything.

To support people being their oneselves, we have to understand their views on the world and what they are passionate about in life, as well as what they are passionate about the company and what's important to them at work.

Move away from policing. As the workplace changes, HR needs to evolve. As HR professionals and business leaders we need to move away from policing, rule-based guidance to a role in which we provide expert people advice in partnership with CEOs, managers and employees to get the best from people.

We all have a people responsibility in our organisations – it can't just be the remit of HR. For all of us to be our oneselves, everyone in the organisation has to make people their number one priority. If each of us does our bit, and lives as our oneself, we will all support the world being a healthy place to work in so we can all do our best and feel our best, contributing to overall economic growth.