

The Great Return: Now is time to walk the talk

By Craig Hannabus

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Remote working in South Africa seems to be a point of contention, including in the advertising and media industry.



Source: © Ola Dapo [pexels](#) The Great Return: Some love remote working, others miss the office environment

Do a quick Google search and you're going to find many articles with conflicting opinions.

When I did a quick poll on my LinkedIn page, I got a similar response. Some say that their businesses are fully remote and they're happy about it, some say that they don't trust their workers enough to keep them remote, noting dips in productivity.

On the side of the workers, there is a lot of conflict too. Some miss the interactions they had with colleagues, others find the home office environment a more productive space. There are a lot more factors, but that isn't the crux of the matter.

The real issue

What is the crux of the matter is that because remote work is so prevalent internationally, overseas businesses have recognised South Africa as a market ripe with cheap resources.

To give you an example, a community manager earns around \$50,000 p/a in the US. In South Africa, a similar resource will

cost you R180,000 a year.

In other words, if you're working from home for a US business, you're earning R800,000 a year. US businesses can pay a South African somewhat less and get the same level of competence. It's a no-brainer.

The ramifications are obvious. Local businesses are losing resources to international companies. It's just impossible to compete with those kinds of salaries.

This creates a scarcity of local staff resources, making recruitment a protracted process, putting pressure on existing staff to fill the gap.

This in turn drives existing staff to also look for international remote work as well. It's a self-perpetuating cycle.

Let's recap, you're earning triple your salary, you're working fully from home, and in many instances you are working shorter hours. Why would you keep working at a South Africa business?



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Fear of the unknown

Fortunately, there is one reason, and it's a bit of a nasty one: fear of the unknown. People are less inclined to make dramatic changes when there is very little drive to do so.

What this boils down to is that the happier your staff, the less inclined you are to lose them. A no-brainer, right? Why is it so difficult for local businesses to get right?

This research may be a little bit old, but in 2019 CareerJunction published a piece of research highlighting why most South Africans quit their jobs.

Trust, approachability, favouritism, and taking credit for work done by others were just a few of the reasons given.

Granted, compensation played a role, but it was dwarfed by the softer, more relationship-based variables.

What is the perception that we're so bad at people management? Is it a lack of access to cost-effective managerial courses?

Is it the assumption that when you reach a certain age you'll have the wisdom to lead people effectively? Perhaps it isn't a problem that's native to South Africa.

I can't tell you. What I can tell you is that if you've been punting the 'people first' narrative in your organisation, now's the time to walk the talk.

ABOUT CRAIG HANNABUS

Craig is the strategy director at Rogerwilco. His most recent career history, which spans more than 15 years, is dominated by digital - before that he worked in logistics.

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