

Final Jayne Matthew

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Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

And, I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: The job market has undergone major changes due to the Covid pandemic. Studies show that large numbers of people have left their jobs and there is now a surplus of positions and not enough candidates to fill them. How are companies dealing with this situation? Joining us today is Jayne Matthew, an executive with a major communications company.

JM: Thank you, it's my pleasure to be here. It's an interesting topic and very relevant right now.

VC: Oh, absolutely. So we're hearing in the news that it is difficult to get people to come back to the workplace after working remotely for a year or so. Is it true that at this time it is an employee's market and if that's the case why do you think it is?

JM: That is definitely true in my experience and in the communications area. You know, the pandemic showed people what's possible, and what work could look like. My firm, prior to the pandemic, was already allowing people to work from home two days a week. And so going totally remote during the pandemic wasn't a huge shift for them. But now that they're home, they love it, they have been very productive and they have a much better work-life balance and so for my firm and I know a lot of others people don't want to come back. They like how their life is right now and we are going to bring people back twice a month for staff meetings and the staff is balking at doing that mostly because they see commuting as a total waste of time.

KK: That is really interesting. Since you're in the communications field, are there any unique problems in the public relations field for people who don't want to come back, do you think?

JM: One big one would be dealing with clients. We don't know how our clients are going to work going forward, whether they're going to want to have in-person meetings and so we'll have to adjust to that but we're not sure that our employees will. They're not seeing the need to come into an office at all. So hopefully our clients are having the same issues and they'll stay remote but that's one problem that we know we'll face. The other is, you know, we're in the creative field and we collaborate a lot and that's how we do our best work and collaborating is very different when you do it remotely. That said, I

believe that statement is a generational one and that the younger professionals in our office don't share that view.

KK: Have you recruited anybody during the pandemic and if so, what were the difficulties and what are these people asking that they would never – asking for perks that they would not necessarily have done before Covid?

JM: We have done a lot of recruiting. I think in the communications area it might be a little mixed but generally firms did okay or very well during the pandemic, a surprise to everyone, and so there's a lot of hiring going on. There's also a lot of movement going on right now with people wanting to change jobs because they want higher pay. We're paying higher salaries than we ever paid before and they want to move up quickly. So previously, say, someone in a junior position or any position would tend to stay at that level for two years before moving up. Now you're lucky if you can wait a year before moving someone up or you're going to lose them.

VC: Have you hired anybody during this time?

JM: We hired six people in our firm of 20, so a large number proportionally. It was very difficult. It was at least a minimum of six months to recruit for a position and because we're remote we're recruiting from a wider geographic area than we used to. We used to look for people just in state or nearby but now we're looking much broader. And even that, people are negotiating salaries much more frequently. Almost always they're negotiating for more time off and of course to work remotely. They're getting many offers at the same time and accepting and then declining offers. We had one situation where we hired for an administrative assistant position and the person accepted the job, came to our staff meeting and then a few days later said she got an offer for twice as much money so she was going to take that.

KK: This administrative assistant, do these recent graduates have the ability to say yes and then no? Or, are these people who have been in the workplace for a while?

JM: These are people in the workplace and they are interviewing for a lot of jobs at one time. A few offers come in, they may accept more than one while they think about it and then they decline it. Or they lead you to believe they're going to accept the offer and negotiate much beyond what you were willing to offer to begin with and then they decline the position. And as a result we've had to do a lot of internal promotions that we weren't expecting to do because we can't bring someone in from the outside with equal experience and hire them at a higher level so it's really affecting us from every angle.

VC: Do you find that the younger applicants ask for more perks than the more experienced applicants?

JM: I'm not finding that. The more experienced applicants are asking for a lot right now because they can. And they can get it.

KK: Now you're working remotely. Your company has decided to continue that, correct?

JM: Yes. We're going to stay working remotely. Trying to get people to come in twice a month for a staff meeting and we'll see how that goes.

KK: So there are really no restrictions you have to abide by—or are there any because of the pandemic?

JM: We actually do have some restrictions. Everyone who comes into the office has to sign an acknowledgement form that they don't have a fever, that they're not sick, and haven't been exposed to Covid. We believe we have one person who has not been vaccinated and that person has to let us know in advance when they're going to be in the office so that we can advise people and give them the option not to come.

VC: You do ask employees if they have been vaccinated, is that right?

JM: Yes.

KK: I was watching CNN this morning before I left the house and they were interviewing an Olympic swimmer because of what's going on in Japan with the Olympics. And they asked, have you been vaccinated? And he said, that's a personal question. And I thought, oh, boy. So I would imagine companies – what can they do about that?

JM: Well, I should clarify, we don't ask each individual. We took a survey of our employees and everyone except one person indicated that they got the vaccine and by process of deduction we figured out who the person is and it's important to know, you know. We have people who have children who can't be vaccinated and we can't take a chance that they're going to be in the office with someone who's unvaccinated.

VC: What changes in the workplace or office environment do you foresee going forward?

JM: We're going to see a continuation of remote work. Most companies look like they're probably about half of the companies look like they're going toward a hybrid model where you come into the office a few days and work from home a few days. That is clearly the decisions made by the companies and I'm sure they didn't survey their employees to find out if that's what they wanted to do so we'll have to see how that works out, whether people are willing to continue to go into the office for a few days. And you know, to be fair, some people really like going to the office and we have two people who are going in to our office three days a week just because they like not working at home.

KK: I was just thinking when you were saying that about the real estate market for these companies. I mean they are sitting there, for the most part, in empty space if they're only coming two or three days a week. I wonder what they're going to do about it. Has that come up at all?

JM: Absolutely. And it came up for us on day one, March 19<sup>th</sup> I think was our last day in the office because we had just signed our lease weeks before, a new lease for about three years so we're stuck with our office even though if we didn't have a new lease we probably would have tried to move out and gone somewhere else where we have just a small location where people can get together for collaborations. In our building, we work in a big office park and when I went there the other day the parking lots were empty, the buildings were empty.

KK: Wow. That's scary.

JM: It is scary. It's a big change for the real estate industry, developers, people who sell office furniture, and all the related jobs.

VC: Yes, these are very far-reaching consequences and at this point I guess we, nobody knows how it's going to resolve.

JM: No, it's yet to be seen.

KK: Yeah, this pandemic has changed everything.

JM: Another change that we're seeing is people who worked at home who had children would have their children in daycare or have a sitter there while they worked from home. And that's not the case anymore because they showed, over the last year, that they can figure out how to work at home and take care of their children and so I'm wondering how the daycare industry has been affected by this.

VC: That's an interesting question. Especially for children, and the younger ones, it is very important for them to socialize with their peers.

JM: Yeah, I would agree with that.

VC: That's an area that I am sure is undergoing lots of change.

JM: Yeah, I'm sure.

KK: It's touched everybody in every part of every industry. It really has.

JM: Yeah. And a lot of these changes are really good for employees, good for families. It's nice to be able to walk your dog during the day and run to the store or throw in your laundry.

KK: That's true.

VC: It's interesting. I've worked as a freelancer being based from home and I've also worked for companies where, you know, going to the office every day and for myself personally, I like a hybrid because I like being able to set my own schedule to do my work independently but I also enjoy being around other human beings and the collaborative environment. I like that a lot too. So I guess we'll see what the future holds!

KK: It sounds like they're getting the best of both worlds if they do meet for meetings and what have you. It takes a lot of discipline to work from home, though.

JM: It does, especially if you do have a family at home.

VC: Do you find that people are more productive working remotely?

JM: I would say yes there are folks who have been extremely productive and I know that part of it is because they truly wanted it to work. But also, they're not commuting and some of our people commute an hour or more each way and so that's time that they either have with their families or have to work and that makes them happier rather than being in a car going somewhere.

KK: Yes.

VC: Right.

KK: It takes that stress away.

JM: Yeah. Happy employees are productive employees.

VC:

KK: Yes, that's right.

KK: We enjoyed having you today and really setting the record straight that this is what's happening out there. We do have to accept that this is a whole other way of working.

JM: There are a lot of challenges going forward.

VC: Jayne, sounds like you are meeting them.

JM: We're trying!

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