

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([00:00](#)):

The way you're working is not working. The old school approach of sacrificing your personal life for professional gain has succeeded only in breeding a workplace culture of overwork, disengagement, and burnout. Welcome to the Work Less, Produce More Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Lisa Belanger, CEO of ConsciousWorks consulting and expert in proactive mental health and performance in the workplace. My goal is to teach leaders to consciously build their workplace culture. Whether you're leading five people or 500, the dynamics you set in your workplace matter, we will cover essential skills to live and lead sustainable work, leveraging the latest research on how to work. And maybe even more importantly, learning how to unwork. This podcast will help you work sustainably, lean in and enjoy it with the support of an inspired and fulfilled team. While there's no one answer, each episode I will explore with a guest experts, considerations, ideas, and tools you need to create work life integration that fuels your drive instead of draining your ambition.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([01:10](#)):

Today, I'm speaking with Dr. Benjamin Granger. I really enjoy Dr. Granger every single time I email him and ask if he's thought of or heard any research about whatever my question might be and he's always involved in researching these exact same questions. Dr. Benjamin Granger is the head of the employee experience advisory services and serves as an adjunct faculty for the Qualtrics XM Institute. He has over a decade of building Experience Management programs across the globe and leads the employee experiment, thought leadership and research initiatives at the XM Institute. I know you guys have been digging in and Qualtrics about the four-day work week. So I'd love for you to introduce some of that research and what you've been finding?

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([01:58](#)):

This falls under a bigger umbrella of research that we've been doing around workplace flexibility.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([02:03](#)):

Great.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([02:04](#)):

And so, we've been doing a tremendous amount of research on return to work policies all the way back to vaccine mandates and how to manage that and remote work versus hybrid work and the effects of that, how people two years after the pandemic started, how were they looking at their work life? And the four-day work week was one that kept coming up from our customers and in the market where there was just a lot of noise. It was a lot of interest in it. And so, for this particular study... Again, within that umbrella of workplace flexibility, we wanted to understand how interested are people in this? The high level finding was that people are very interested in it, but they understand, and they recognize that there's probably some trade offs that we need to dive deeper into.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([02:52](#)):

Talk to me about that interest, why you think it's there? And then I'd love to hear your thoughts on trade off, because I do think it's a complex topic. I don't think there's a simple answer to how many days a week we should be working.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([03:04](#)):

I completely agree. Personally, I don't think it is a simple answer, but what is very clear from the study is a large percentage of... At least in this study was American workers, are really interested. I think it was a little over 90% said they'd be very interested. And they proposed that it would help their mental health. They are suggesting that it would help them be more productive even, but on the trade off side, over 50% said they also anticipate it would be very frustrating for customers. They also anticipate that it would be disruptive to their business from a revenue standpoint, from a sales standpoint. And as a scientist, I was really happy to see that because what that tells me is people are being really thoughtful about how they respond to this.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([03:55](#)):

And I think this is the whole conversation is how do we really take care of people? And also really understand that concurrently, we have a bottom line to meet. So as much as I'm like, "I'm on this, my own pursuit of a four-day work week, I run my own business and clients have a little bit of say on my life." So it comes with a cultural shift that would be required too. So as more people lean into this, obviously in so many ways, when we look from a cultural perspective, Europe's better at taking time off generally than North Americans and other parts of the world with a culture that's just like, "I'll get back to you when I get back to you." Versus, "Here's 17 numbers to call, and I will get back to you as soon as possible."

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([04:37](#)):

In seeing that like, and I know even from your personal work, there's so many challenges with getting that down to four days, from your insight, from your research, and then from research you've read what are... I'm going to stick to the work side of things, frustrations, possible downsides to restricting the work week.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([04:59](#)):

I think some people assume that it's about, "Okay, we're going to take 40 hours and we're going to cram it into four days." I don't necessarily think that's true. If this four-day work week gets adoption. I also started to consider... As we were looking at the data, different profiles of people. A four-day work week could be really cool on the surface for certain people at certain stage in life but what about a working parent who now has to go and adjust all of their childcare, not just for the day that they're off, but for the days that they're working extra hours? That could be incredibly disruptive. What about the folks... Maybe, you could consider us crazy, that's fair. I'm a little crazy.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([05:46](#)):

That's fine.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([05:47](#)):

Crazy that if you did have an extra day, what would you do with it?

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([05:50](#)):

Right.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([05:50](#)):

And my personal answer would be, I would probably do some work.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([05:55](#)):

I think that's been the most interesting thing when I start discussing this with people. And I'm outing you a little bit here, but like you first were like, "I drink beer and I'd be on a boat somewhere and I'd fish or whatever it is." Right? These things that we are like, "Oh, we long to do this." But that's once or twice. And then when you start it's every single week, we start diving into why we do the work we do. So even talking to physicians, they talked about volunteering more for the people that they're working with anyway, if they had more time. For academics, it's writing or reading or something along those lines, do we come as employers so paternalistic that we're like, "You should work this many hours. You should work this many days." And how does that help or hurt people's sustainability?

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([06:40](#)):

That is a really interesting point because, and this is a bit of a tangent, but I remember when I was doing my doctoral studies, I was really interested in the effect of control that learners have over their learning environment. Well, one of the highlights of the research I did in that time was it was about how much control people had that made them react very positively. And that might be a key here is... There's a difference between feeling like I have to work today and between me feeling like, "Hey, I'd like to do some work today." Two very, very different things.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([07:18](#)):

Well, and as a control enthusiast myself, this I think is so interesting. And then if you look at the literature around burnout autonomy and control is one of the key contributing factors. So it's not even workload, it's how much control do you have over your workload? And so, this is one thing that we don't measure very well at all, is trustworthiness of people and how much leaders trust their workers. That's been really interesting as well because it's starting to just become part of the conversation in a regular work world is how much do we trust? How much do we feel trusted? And how do we measure it?

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([07:57](#)):

That is a great point. And we chatted about this before, all the monitoring or the [inaudible 00:08:02] monitoring.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([08:02](#)):

Right.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([08:03](#)):

Some companies are doing for certain populations now that we're moving more into hybrid work and remote work. And I don't want to say it's a terrible thing to do because I can imagine some scenarios where it's necessary, but I just have to think, "Boy, that screams, I don't trust you"

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([08:20](#)):

100%. And it's never a good feeling and I understand it from both perspectives, I'm an employer. So I certainly understand wanting to know where time is being used from an efficiency perspective, but certainly like a trust and understanding perspective, but that never feels good. Nobody's ever been like, "I don't trust [inaudible 00:08:39] thank you." It's universally not a great feeling. And so I think this is one of the things that employers are going to really have to deal with over the next little while as we get into, do we stay remote? Are we hybrid? Are we in office, et cetera. Is what does that look like? And

how do we lead through that? Have you been able to section out leaders in a lot of the research and the conversations you're having? Is there anything that's coming out from a leadership perspective?

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([09:06](#)):

One angle to this is that there's four-day work week research and even hybrid remote work research that we've done, leaders are more skeptical and they also come off as less interested in this idea of remote work or even a four-day work week than are people who are not people leaders. That says something for one.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([09:27](#)):

Yes.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([09:28](#)):

I also think that... Thinking about leadership from a different angle, just to take a bit of a tangent [inaudible 00:09:34] but we did a big study on how vacation time gets used. And we saw that there was a very sizable percentage, almost... It was a more than a quarter of American workers were saying, they're not rejuvenated after they come back from vacation.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([09:52](#)):

Yes.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([09:53](#)):

Because most of them are working on vacation.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([09:56](#)):

Yes.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([09:57](#)):

Yeah. And that then leads to the question of leadership. Well, what is leadership's role in all this? And I believe that it's to model how it should be done. And it goes to how we plan our work. If a company is interested in exploring a four-day work week, it starts with leaders modeling that. Right?

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([10:19](#)):

Yeah.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([10:19](#)):

You've described it very nicely in your pursuit to try this four-day work week out, it's caused you to be more planful.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([10:28](#)):

Absolutely.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([10:29](#)):

Right?

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([10:29](#)):

You have to be so much more conscious of your days. And I mean the off days, the on days, your leadership style, your communication, all of it has to just be so much more deliberate. And I just want to note on the vacation front, the subsequent years of the podcast, I was able to interview experts on what the heck the perfect vacation is because to your point, people are working on vacation, but more than that, they have anticipatory stress to leave the workplace and then an anticipatory stress to come back to the workplace. So some of these experts are saying actual ideal vacation is four days because you can fully disengage. And most people feel like the Fort will be held down and there's not as much of that stress on either side of it. And I love that idea of these long weekends and really diving into whatever you're doing on those long weekends.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([11:20](#)):

That's a great learning and again, it goes back to leaders...

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([11:24](#)):

Yes.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([11:25](#)):

[inaudible 00:11:25] do that. Take your vacation time. And if you believe that it's important, allow your team to talk about mental health. That was another study we ran related to all this is, employees were saying the biggest resource they want from their employer to combat mental health. I was expecting it would be a tangible resource.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([11:47](#)):

Right.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([11:48](#)):

The [inaudible 00:11:48] response was a culture where I can talk openly about my mental health.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([11:52](#)):

100%. Even if you're just... We all have mental health. I think this is my biggest frustration being in this field is people... A lot of leaders especially will be like, "Oh, mental health is for other people." I'm like, "No, we all have it." And being able to talk about it... And one of the great expressions of this that is just a human phenomenon is grief in how we don't have the words and we don't know how to talk about it at work, which is so unfortunate because every single person will go through it. So what I'm hearing kind of through this too, is leaders need to lead differently. So we need different strategies on how to lead different success markers from a trust perspective, different communication on our own break strategy or vacations, or what have you. And then being able to be conscious and deliberate about communication on vacation, or if you're doing this four day work week to not just bring people back in continuously into their work. So that's really interesting and kind of a tangible takeaway is how do we then train leaders for what's next in work?

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([12:54](#)):

It's a great point about leadership and the fact that leadership is different today. It needs to be different today than it was even just two years ago. I think there is mounting evidence that being a leader is hard

than it used to be because of these things. And also because of how people have been promoted, right? It's no surprise that in many industries, people get promoted in the leadership for being good at their core job, but there's more of an awareness... I'm sensing, I'm seeing more of an awareness among my customers, among the research we're doing and acknowledgement that, "Hey, those soft skills that we used to talk about being soft, that we call soft. Those aren't really soft anymore. Those are hard"

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([13:40](#)):

Those are essential.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([13:42](#)):

Those are essential. So you almost could flip flop. The hard skills for leadership are really the soft skills and vice versa.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([13:50](#)):

I couldn't agree more and I've tried to change language around this a lot because it doesn't matter what your job is. You're communicating with other people. So you have to be able to understand conflict resolution, talking about mental wellbeing, talking about people, being human. Actually, we have to go back to being human. That's essentially what it is. So for you... And I think this is so, so interesting because I come from a similar background in research and academia, slightly recovering from it. There's a lot of reward systems that promote just extensive work, whether that's publications, whether that's grants, whether... Whatever it is, there's a lot of reward for extensive work. How do you adequately separate yourself... Or do you on your time off or being able to liberate yourself from the pressures of the heaviness of work?

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([14:36](#)):

There's a few things that I do. I share with these all with my team. One, is I am very open about taking mental health days. I call it a mental health day. I put it on my calendar as a mental health day and I tell my team, I'm taking a mental health day. If they see me doing it, then they're going to feel much more comfortable talking about it and doing it themselves. And I actually call it out when one of our team members says it, I say, "Hey, good for you." We'll talk about it publicly if they're comfortable with it. Another thing I've learned to do, this goes for my vacation time, as well as at the end of the day, I started taking my... We use Google Suite, for communication and we use Slack and I take Slack and I take Google and I move them off to a page on my phone that I never look at.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([15:26](#)):

I used to have them at the forefront so I could always see. But what would happen is I would see all the... I see the number, keep jumping up, "Oh, there's eight unread Slacks. I need to go check that. So I'm not bombarded tomorrow." Very much like that anticipatory stress that you feel, right? Anticipatory stress for tomorrow. But here's the thing, I started just moving it over and I kind of forget about it. It's helped me create a boundary for myself and I have yet to run into a scenario where there wasn't something I could deal with the next day.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([15:57](#)):

Well, this is the thing, like we all think like there is jobs that you have to be on call and that there is that communication required. Ours aren't as much as we'd like to think about sometimes. And this is the

thing that somebody told me from a leadership perspective, if this is a question that isn't emergent to wait 24 hours before responding, because often somebody will then solve it themselves. And it's actually allowing them and giving them some responsibility over that. And then certainly creating communication lines where if it is urgent and you can't do your job, or you need this to move on, here's how to communicate, which is usually like phone or something that's more pressing and rare. So you're not going through all the other stuff to find it. I love the mental health date. I don't think we do it enough or talk about it nearly enough. We all need them and I do see companies allowing for a certain amount of them and then being able to have leaders actually model that and call it out.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([16:53](#)):

It's essential. The other thing I would say is, for myself, and this is something I've really... Brené Brown was a person who really sparked this for me mentally was this notion of vulnerability. It's not dissimilar you were talking about, it's just going back to being human. Let's just all be human a little bit. I think we all had a dose of that over the last two years and realize how important it was, even down to the TV shows that we watched. I'll use a silly example during quarantine, we got really into Lego Masters. And what I really liked about it was how unscripted it was, it was just like they [inaudible 00:17:33] all the mistakes. And I was like, "I love it. I love it. I love the fact that [inaudible 00:17:37]"

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([17:37](#)):

[inaudible 00:17:37] though. Everything's been so presented to us for two years. People are editing everything, presenting perfection, even like, you not feeling perfect today, you take yourself off screen for meetings or you do whatever it is, but you're able to control what people are seeing. So we're craving reality and I don't mean reality TV. I think these are two different things, but we're craving that realness and that vulnerability and that human part of it. And it feels like we've gone so far away from it that... I do think that most business schools need to like, "How to be human at work." And being able to teach some of these skill sets because we are so digital in our communication, we are so scripted and photoshopped and presented perfection, which is not reality.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([18:25](#)):

And look, this is hard. And a lot of industries especially industrial, manufacturing, one of the examples I'll use for this is one of the auto major, auto manufacturers in the US was really spending a lot of time, energy and money into teaching their leaders how to be vulnerable.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([18:48](#)):

Of course.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([18:48](#)):

And the first time I heard that, I thought it was really strange. Like that's a weird thing to invest multimillion dollars in. That was pre-pandemic, by the way, fast forward a few years and now I'm realizing how brilliant it was. And if you fast forward to see what that company's doing now, which I'm not at Liberty to share who it is, but they have transformed their business and are in the process of transforming their business and likely a catalyst for that was teaching their leaders to really dive into the soft skills to show vulnerability. And people don't want to work for robots, they don't want to work for somebody who's perfect, they know that you're human and they want you to be.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([19:32](#)):

I think you raised a couple really good topics. I've seen the top four consulting firms coming up and saying, empathy is the number one leadership skill in the last couple years. They keep saying for the future of work, but it's actually right now. And so, to be able to invest in that, because that is not something we were led with and that's not something that... It's a learned skill, you're not born with it. So to be able to develop that particularly in the relationships at work is so interesting. The other thing is, and we talked slightly about this when we chatted before is the mental wellbeing and vulnerability specifically of men and how different that has been and what is demanded of it today isn't the same as what it was two years ago. And so you're talking about a male dominated profession where we're asking for vulnerability as a key asset in our business strategy, which just again, amazing that they did it pre-pandemic. And now everybody's start starting to realize how important that is.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([20:26](#)):

Spot on. It's one of those things where... And I'm from a microculture in the US where you don't show weakness as a man. And I identify as a man, but I'm realizing now that a lot of what I've learned, I have to unlearn because a lot of that is not helping me be a leader that I need to be for my team. And so I have to unlearn a lot of those things.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([20:53](#)):

Which is possible, but very challenging too, right? Like being able to say, "Oh, that's just fundamentally how I was raised." You just have to unlearn that. No big deal.

Dr. Benjamin Granger ([21:04](#)):

It's a painful but rewarding process.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([21:06](#)):

Absolutely. That's a great end. We just need to be better humans. If you haven't already look into the executive coaching we offer, we work with leaders to build awareness of strengths and opportunities for improvement in relation to business and leadership needs. Totally customize, our process has four phases self-reflection, action plan, drive growth and evaluate impact. Visit our website for more information at [consciousworks.com](http://consciousworks.com). Thank you for listening to the Work Less, Produce More Podcast. You can find me on LinkedIn and Instagram to follow my mission of living a four-day work week or well, other versions of it at Lisa Belanger.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([21:47](#)):

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