

A Better Place of Business

Episode 4: Transcript

Why progressive leave policies matter

[00:00:00] **Linda Mzamane:** Ah, yes, the pursuit of a better place of business. An ongoing quest to create work environments that foster growth, inspire innovation, and support the well-being of every employee. When it comes to building such a haven, there is one aspect that has emerged as a defining factor in attracting and retaining top talent: a generous and comprehensive leave policy.

[00:00:25] **Linda Mzamane:** In the landscape of modern employment, prospective job seekers hold this benefit as non-negotiable. We're currently witnessing a paradigm shift where more and more organisations understand the significance of leave policies that go beyond mere survival or what is legally required, extending a hand to embrace progress.

[00:00:45] **Linda Mzamane:** A publishing company called Hardy Grant announced a bunch of new leave entitlements for their employees recently. They range from menstrual leave to fertility treatment leave, gender transition leave and even pet [00:01:00] bereavement or pet illness leave. According to golegal.co.za, The Basic Conditions of Employment Act entitles all South Africans to "21 consecutive days' annual leave on full pay in every leave cycle.

[00:01:14] **Linda Mzamane:** This equates to 15 working days per year if you work a five-day week and 18 working days per year if you work a six-day week. This leave allocation is the recreational kind – and most of us feel it doesn't quite touch sides. That's why in certain years, some South Africans have figured out how to turn those 15 days into 44 paid days off per year, by incorporating public holidays.

[00:01:38] **Linda Mzamane:** As well as annual leave and sick leave, the law has allocations for family responsibility, religious, maternity and parental leave. However, some aspects of these policies, including whether certain types of leave are paid or unpaid, are still up to the employer. Other countries feel it too.

[00:01:59] **News Clip:** We have no state laws that say you have to provide a certain [00:02:00] number of vacation days.

[00:02:00] **Linda Mzamane:** Users on TikTok have been creating content to share their opinions about leave.

[00:02:05] **News Clip:** The United States is the only advanced economy that does not guarantee paid time off. We have no federal law saying that you have to provide a certain number of vacation days. You have entire cultures like, you know, France is a good example where pretty much everybody takes August off and it's just part of the culture. You don't really see that here in the United States. Even though a majority of Americans do have some kind of paid time off, a little less than half actually take all of their available vacation time. There's a certain fear, uh, we don't have any legal protections and so people have been fired for taking vacation time.

[00:02:38] **Video Clip:** I'm a workaholic by, by my very nature, right? One of the things that I used to struggle with early on in my career was I didn't want to leave because I was afraid that people would think I wasn't needed.

[00:02:48] **Linda Mzamane:** From the sounds of things, the US is lagging behind in terms of its paid time off or leave policies. Some countries in Europe, on the other hand, are miles ahead in creating a system that accommodates the need to disconnect from work.

[00:02:54] **Linda Mzamane:** Some countries in Europe, on the other hand, are miles ahead on creating a system that accommodates the need to [00:03:00] disconnect from work. UNICEF champions the importance of redesigning businesses to put families first across all economies by highlighting the benefit it holds for children, women and economic growth, saying: "The lack of such policies compromises parents' ability to securely bond with their babies in the first critical years of life –

[00:03:22] **Linda Mzamane:** a time, evidence tells us, when the combination of the right nourishment, a loving environment and stimulating care can strengthen a baby's developing brain and give her the best start in life. "The good news is that momentum for change is growing. An increasing number of businesses are beginning to see the value of offering family-friendly policies."

[00:03:44] **Linda Mzamane:** Today, we embark on a journey through the intricacies of leave policies. I'm your host, Linda Mzamane, and you're listening to A Better Place of Business, brought to you by Life Health Solutions. Joining me today are Bradly Howland, CEO of Alkemi Collective, and Carmen Arico, chartered reward specialist and spokesperson for the South African Reward Association. I'm looking forward to hearing your insights and experiences.

[00:04:07] **Linda Mzamane:** I'm looking forward to hearing your insights and your experiences. Hello, Carmen and Bradly. I really wanted to kick off with you, Carmen. Can you share your thoughts on how employee expectations regarding paid time off have evolved over the years?

[00:04:23] **Carmen Arico:** Well, thank you for that question, Linda. So I think the traditional models of leave have evolved from very limited leave offerings.

[00:04:33] **Carmen Arico:** Uh, people used to think about it as annual leave mainly, but now navigating the landscape within which we work, we're looking at a lot more varieties of leave that should be offered. So surrogacy leave, for example, adoption leave, even moving into things like menopausal leave. So I think knowing what we know now about what employees are looking for in the work [00:05:00] space is Employers are using that to drive their employee value propositions to create a more inclusive leave landscape.

[00:05:09] **Linda Mzamane:** And do you think that the push has really come more from employees than employers, I suppose? People are expecting more nowadays.

[00:05:17] **Carmen Arico:** Absolutely. I think employees are more confident, I think, to ask for what they're looking for. I think in a lot of organisations, they are using things like employee voice. Um, or the voice of the employee, whatever they're calling their internal engagement surveys.

[00:05:35] **Carmen Arico:** And employees are stepping up and saying, you know what, this would actually work for me and make me a more productive employee if I had elder care leave, for example. You know, we're looking at a sandwich generation where people are looking after elders as well as children and employees are saying, look, what we have currently may not work for me exactly.

[00:05:54] **Carmen Arico:** Can we talk about what else would work? And I think that certainly is, um, is taking place a lot [00:06:00] more now than it used to.

[00:06:02] **Linda Mzamane:** Absolutely. Absolutely. And Bradley, what impact do you think comprehensive leave policies have on employer satisfaction and retention as well?

[00:06:11] **Bradly Howland:** I think it goes exactly to what Carmen said, is that at the end of the day, we need to treat people like the adults and humans that they are.

[00:06:20] **Bradly Howland:** And when you start recognising them for that, as opposed to trying to infantilize the workplace, You, you ultimately get happier employees, you're recognising them on their level, you're giving them their space. In turn, what I believe often happens is that the value that they provide is a lot richer because you're getting the best out of them.

[00:06:40] **Bradly Howland:** Now you can imagine if somebody, exactly to one of Carmen's examples, is dealing with an elderly parent and is going through quite a difficult time, but the employer is too rigid in the way that they are flexible around leave and time off to ensure that employee, uh, is able to care for the parent.

[00:06:57] **Bradly Howland:** At that moment, they're going to start resenting the employer, they're going to be distracted in their work, so the quality is going to dip as well. And so, overall, if you're providing as much support and care for individuals on their level, what they give in return is going to be a lot more valuable. I mean, we're talking about it.

[00:07:15] **Bradly Howland:** Having just come out of a public holiday as well and how much better we feel by having that time off. It means a lot. It means we're able to focus better. It means that we're able to be more driven in what we do. We're a lot more relaxed and that in turn is something that is important to recognise is that it's not just, okay, well, let's take annual leave.

[00:07:36] **Bradly Howland:** And, and that's enough. It isn't anymore. I think our days are busier. There's a lot more that we're dealing with in terms of stress points. And so if as employers we're able to recognize that and accommodate employees a lot better, in turn, there'll be much more productive and effective team members in any business.

[00:07:56] **Linda Mzamane:** Absolutely. I love that point about the richness of the value that the employee then [00:08:00] gives, I mean, the employee gives in the workplace when they are given that kind of bandwidth there. Carmen, what do you think are the benefits of having these progressive leave policies for businesses? I mean, Bradley touches on the richness of the work that they then bring to the workplace.

[00:08:16] **Linda Mzamane:** What are some other benefits that you can see of having these types of leave policies? You mentioned menstrual leave and things like that and maybe if also on the flip side, if there are any downsides.

[00:08:26] **Carmen Arico:** I think leave policies are one of those places where employers can actually start the revolution of benefits, you know, for their employees, you know, to Bradley's point, life is what happens when you're making other plans.

[00:08:38] **Carmen Arico:** So these policies are put in place to accommodate all those varying needs for employees, and it will foster this environment where employees feel heard, they feel engaged with the business, they feel understood, and they feel like their needs are met and in doing so, the upside is that they're more likely to stay with their employer.

[00:08:59] **Carmen Arico:** They're more likely to [00:09:00] create a feeling of loyalty and this in turn will feed into their workspace. So they may, you know, put in more discretionary effort. So these are the employees that are more likely to go a little bit above and beyond, or above and beyond in a greater space because they feel, you know, what my employer has my back.

[00:09:20] **Carmen Arico:** I've asked for time off. I've needed something in my personal space and personal time. I'm going to give back as needed. And there isn't this feeling of resentment or you're eating into my personal time. It's actually, you know, a bit of give and take with that discretionary effort, there's just decreased burnout.

[00:09:38] **Carmen Arico:** Employees are feeling like I've got the space, I've got the support to actually unwind and unplug. Lower turnover. Again, we're speaking to employees who are less likely to leave the organisation. They're feeling more engaged. They're feeling more committed. There's increased productivity. You know, the list goes on and on with all these upsides.

[00:09:58] **Carmen Arico:** But then to your point, there are always [00:10:00] downsides when you're looking at implementing this and I think one of the biggest downsides that we can talk about is cost. So particularly for your smaller employers who might have to carry a greater cost when implementing these more enhanced policies, um, you know, it carries that significant cost for them.

[00:10:18] **Carmen Arico:** And particularly where you've got employees who need to take time out of the office, there's the cost with replacement cover as well. So not just the cost of providing the, leave but also the cost of covering that absence of the employee in the workspace. So, you know, it's another downside, for example, is the global rollout implementation of policies.

[00:10:46] **Carmen Arico:** What might translate well in one country might not necessarily translate well in another country and we need to be very mindful of things like cultural expectations or what is represented in the local legislation. [00:11:00] And I'll use South Africa as an example. In our labour legislation, we still very much refer to maternity and paternity.

[00:11:08] **Carmen Arico:** So while we might drive a more gender-neutral policy, we still need to make sure that we align to those local legislation. Um, and good governance guidelines as well.

[00:11:17] **Linda Mzamane:** I mean, I think that you know, with those downsides, there's got to be a bit of give and take, I suppose, you know, just to kind of balance it out, um, in some way.

[00:11:26] **Linda Mzamane:** There are some innovative and unconventional leave policies that are, that are coming up as this trend gets further entrenched around the world. Bradly, can you talk about some innovative or unconventional leave policies that companies or your company might've implemented successfully? Which ones have you adopted?

[00:11:46] **Bradly Howland:** Unconventional, it's an interesting word because I think it's leave policies or provisions to accommodate, um, team members better is something we should be doing. It's just because they haven't been done, um, and they may not be written into [00:12:00] legislation yet. But from our perspective, the one that was mentioned was menstrual leave.

[00:12:03] **Bradly Howland:** So menstrual leave is something that isn't necessarily widespread, particularly in South Africa at this point in time. Menstrual leave, the sort of the request for menstrual leave, I think it was in the 1920s or thirties, if I'm not mistaken, when the, when women first started advocating for menstrual leave.

[00:12:19] **Bradly Howland:** And it wasn't really taken up the way that it should have been. And in my opinion, what has happened as a result of that is there's this huge stigma around menstrual, the sort of menstrual period, or that time that is needed from, from a woman's perspective for her body to heal and recover. It's a perfectly natural process.

[00:12:39] **Bradly Howland:** And yet it's given such stigma to it. Employees are expected to come into the office regardless of how they're feeling particularly women who struggle with something like endometriosis, which is a lot more severe, there is a huge stigma on them to say that, but you need to work, you need to come into the office and that's not fair and [00:13:00] so the moment we sort of saw this emerging on a global level, we introduced that immediately into our agency because it was a bit of a no brainer, it makes sense, it's something that we need to recognise and, and we made sure that we made it as public and open as possible doing training with our team members so that we stop breaking down those stigmas so that it isn't something that people hide.

[00:13:21] **Bradly Howland:** Um, equally so, based on labour legislation, employees are entitled to three days of family responsibility leave, which makes sense, but our association with family responsibility leave is usually something very negative, a death in the family, a very sick child, but it doesn't recognise those other moments in life.

[00:13:40] **Bradly Howland:** So for us, we've introduced special leave that celebrates special moments as well. So whether it's a child's graduation, whether it's something else, we make sure that our team members are given that moment. On top of that as well, what we've also done as part of our leave policies is that if somebody is going through something, whether they're [00:14:00] going through infertility treatment, whether they are dealing with a personal

issue like a legal matter or anything like that, we try to accommodate them as much as possible.

[00:14:09] **Bradly Howland:** So whilst it's not written in stone as a direct policy, we also give our team members those moments that they need. We've got a team member who is a single parent of three young kids and so there are many moments that that individual needs to ensure that they're equally being the good parent that they should be.

[00:14:30] **Bradly Howland:** And so for us, it's about making sure we're accommodating that as much as possible. It's

[00:14:34] **Linda Mzamane:** great that it doesn't fall into the bucket of annual leave, because I think back in the day, all of these things that you point out, you know, they would have just said take annual leave and then it just eats away at your time that you'd get at the end of the year, hey?

[00:14:46] **Bradly Howland:** My whole thing is that I think people need rest, right? There are seven types of rest that everybody should have. Yeah. And it's not just sleeping. Um, and, and that rest is how we get our creativity, it's how we get our energy, it's how we get [00:15:00] to those great ideas that we all have inside us and for us if there is a public holiday, um, on a, say, for example, on a Thursday, we want to make that long weekend.

[00:15:10] **Bradly Howland:** So it's immediate time off for everybody over December. We also, I mean, we close the office between Christmas and New Year's, but then we also, what we do is the time before and after, uh, for a week on each side is we also do half days immediately. It doesn't come off people's leave because we want people to ease into their time off.

[00:15:28] **Bradly Howland:** And equally so ease back into the work as well. Mm-hmm. So that it doesn't become a huge pressure on them. We've all been there when we've come off an amazing holiday, and day one is an absolute nightmare. Your inbox is terrifying. Totally. So it undoes all that rest that you've just had. And so for us, it's important that we recognise that to get the best outta somebody, you've gotta make sure that you're, you're giving them those moments that they need when they need it.

[00:15:53] **Bradly Howland:** Um, and, and it, and it requires conversation. So in order for. Um, and so it's about us to ensure that [00:16:00] nobody's A: taking advantage of it, but then also people aren't using it against others because we've heard this in workplaces where people say, oh, this person's on leave, we'll make sure that they work extra hard before, um, so that they can catch up with their work.

[00:16:13] **Bradly Howland:** That's not fair, right? Because then you're making them do the work anyway. Uh, so for us, it's about making sure that we accommodate them as much as possible. We're also seeing that with the pressures, in the economy at the moment, whether we look at the local market or global is that finances are tough for everybody, but equally businesses can't always afford to say, okay, we're going to compensate you financially in every single moment.

[00:16:36] **Bradly Howland:** Most businesses are also equally struggling. So they don't have the money on hand. And you also don't want to overcompensate somebody at that moment.

And then they struggle to find another job if they are looking for alternative employment down the line. And so you have to use these kinds of benefits to make sure that people feel rewarded.

[00:16:55] **Bradly Howland:** They feel, um, that they're getting something out of it for all the great things that they're putting into a [00:17:00] business.

[00:17:01] **Carmen Arico:** And to Bradly's point as well. I've also heard of companies doing things like duvet days, and it's more of a mental, a mental wellbeing day, but for those that don't really feel comfortable saying, you know what, today's a really rough day, or I had a really, really rough week with the kids, with stress, whatever it happens to be.

[00:17:19] **Carmen Arico:** I actually just need a day where I can recoup and so you have this duvet day that you can take any time you need just to get some space from whatever is crushing down on you. No stigma attached, and no need to provide any reason. You just say you know what, today I'm taking my duvet day.

[00:17:37] **Linda Mzamane:** I really like that.

[00:17:38] **Bradly Howland:** It's a good one. I mean that actually goes to what Carmen mentioned earlier about burnout. So at the end of the day, what any smart business should be doing is ensuring that their team never burns out. And so anything that's going to support them to ensure that that doesn't happen, a business needs to be doing because it's going to cost the business in the long run and it goes to mental health. We know, that post-COVID, mental health has become such an important issue for business leaders to be cognizant of and encourage people to be a lot more open about it. As business leaders and employers, it's our duty to ensure that we're providing as much to individuals to give them that space.

[00:18:28] **Linda Mzamane:** When it comes to work-life balance, obviously these leave policies, you know, do contribute to that. Carmen, in what ways do you think these kinds of leave policies contribute to a better work-life balance for employees?

[00:18:42] **Carmen Arico:** Well, I think there are two schools of thought. And one of them is there's work-life balance. And in work-life balance, you know, you're enforcing boundaries. You understand where your limits are and there's also work-life integration, which I think acknowledges that work and life aren't [00:19:00] necessarily separate entities.

[00:19:01] **Carmen Arico:** There's kind of a blending approach and I think whichever approach a company takes. Um, they need to understand what those outcomes are going to look like. So one of the things that employers need to do, irrespective of the approach, is create the space for employees to actually unplug. You know, we carry our phones with us day to day.

[00:19:21] **Carmen Arico:** Our phones are our lives but in doing so, we're also permanently connected to work at the same time. So having policies that actually say you're not expected to log into your email, you're not expected to take phone calls, you're not, there are no punitive measures if you don't decide to join a Zoom on holiday. Take the time, unwind, rest, you know, get your focus back, spend time with your family, spend the time doing what you need to do.

[00:19:52] **Carmen Arico:** Don't carry that guilt with you for unplugging. And I think that is something that needs to come through whichever approach they take is to [00:20:00] make sure people can unplug without the guilt factor.

[00:20:04] **Linda Mzamane:** Yeah, because there's also the danger then as, um, I know personally, a lot of people who do it as well, who you're on leave, but then you still want to check in, you still want to log on, you still want to, and then you come back and you're not rested at all because your brain is half been at work and then.

[00:20:19] **Linda Mzamane:** You know, half trying to be on the beach in Spain or whatever. But when it comes to the now, the implementation and management of this kind of progressive leave policy, Bradly, I'm sure there are challenges that may pop up when you are in the implementation and management of these. Can you talk about any challenges that organizations can face when it comes to the management and implementation of these, of these kinds of leave policies?

[00:20:48] **Bradly Howland:** Yeah, I think it goes down to adherence, right? So, um, as Carmen pointed out, you've got to make sure that your policies are built properly to accommodate every type of leave provision that [00:21:00] an employer may give. But at the same time, it's also making sure that you do that effectively. So, what often happens is people set up these really robust policies, frameworks, systems, processes, and everything else in between, and then people don't use the property.

[00:21:13] **Bradly Howland:** And I'm not just talking about employees, I'm talking about employers. Employees are probably worse off in terms of properly managing and monitoring it to ensure that people are using it properly and that as much as you don't want an employee taking advantage, what you also don't want to do is an employer taking advantage of it by not necessarily doing it properly either.

[00:21:32] **Bradly Howland:** And so in both cases, it is about the proper monitoring and management of it. For example, we've got, um, with some of our policies, we've put in a clause as well where we talk about it's also based on your performance, right? So, um, we don't use that as a punitive measure, but if, for example, somebody is taking advantage of every single leave policy, work is dropping, they're not really doing what they need to do, they're missing every single deadline and output that's required of them, [00:22:00] that's when certain benefits, we, we almost take a pause on it.

[00:22:03] **Bradly Howland:** We say, look, what we need is actually for you to be in office. We need you or we need you online. We need you to work. We need you to deliver this work otherwise, these benefits, you're basically taking advantage of it. And all that work then puts other people's jobs in jeopardy. Either they have to pick up the slack.

[00:22:19] **Bradly Howland:** They have to fix the mistakes. It jeopardises a possible revenue line. And so in those instances, adherence and sort of respect of that is so, so critically important for both the employee and the employer to ensure that that happens. I think the one thing that Carmen also mentioned as well about the leave policies is it's this idea of you don't want to have this fear.

[00:22:38] **Bradly Howland:** And so what is really, really important as well is making sure that the leaders in a business are actively engaging with employees on a day-to-day basis to ensure that they're using it properly and they're encouraging it to, to be done correctly. Whether it is, if somebody needs time off, make sure they take that time off.

[00:22:58] **Bradly Howland:** Yeah. Don't just [00:23:00] wait until they burn out. It's encouraged them if they're still sitting at their desk at five o'clock or still online, uh, you know, at nine o'clock in the evening. You, you, you moan at them. I do that all the time. I actually get very upset when I see somebody working because busyness is not an accolade.

[00:23:14] **Bradly Howland:** There's more than enough time in our days to be able to effectively do things properly. And if you can't, then the issue there is that it's actually an employer issue where they haven't resourced or capacitated individuals to be successful. And so in those instances, it's really, really, really important that that adherence takes place.

[00:23:36] **Bradly Howland:** For example, if somebody is on leave. Or if it's a weekend and you need them to help with something, you ask permission first. And it starts with something as simple as that. That's how you adhere to a policy, is you respect the time off. But at the same time, if you know you need somebody, that work-life integration does happen.

[00:23:51] **Bradly Howland:** Sometimes people do need to be pulled into things that may be during odd hours, whether it's personal or professional. And in [00:24:00] those moments, you just, it's, it's about that communication and permission. To say, is it okay that I do this? Is it okay that I contact you on the weekend because I know that this client urgently needs something that is a, we're dealing with a crisis, we need to pull you in, would you be okay with this?

[00:24:15] **Bradly Howland:** And if not, and they say no, they have every right to say no.

[00:24:20] **Linda Mzamane:** Without feeling bad about it either.

[00:24:21] **Bradly Howland:** Totally, because then it's the employer's duty to have backup plans. You can't expect employees to be at the beck and call of employers all the time because when that happens, that respect starts forming on both sides. In usage of how these leave provisions are given, but then also in terms of when outside of the leave itself is when that compromise is needed.

[00:24:43] **Bradly Howland:** And that I think is so, so important. If that doesn't happen, all these great ideas fall flat very quickly.

[00:24:49] **Linda Mzamane:** I also think there's something you said that needs to be blown up and put up as a poster in every office. What is it? Busyness is not an accolade. I think people just become obsessed with the idea [00:25:00] of just wanting to be doing something.

[00:25:02] **Linda Mzamane:** Carmen, how can companies strike that balance between being supportive of employee well-being, and maintaining productivity at the same time? It's like, how do you make sure that you know, one isn't chosen over the other?

[00:25:16] **Carmen Arico:** So I think there's definitely a two-pronged approach here. And the first one is the capacity planning.

[00:25:20] **Carmen Arico:** And we've spoken about it is ensuring that the business needs to ensure that there's capacity planning, there's work cover for whoever is going on leave. You know, that could be something as simple as, Um, and saying, all right, let's plan out our leave for the year. Those who have known holidays, for example, let's see how we can create that.

[00:25:41] **Carmen Arico:** Let's create a little bit of structure here and, you know, the second one is just making sure that there's a minimum number of leave days that people should take during a year. So let's say, for example, your leave in time is 15 days. Would you have to take eight of [00:26:00] those days this year? And managers need to know, and that's where the capacity planning comes in.

[00:26:05] **Carmen Arico:** It's to say, right guys, where are you going to put your eight days? Are you going to bank them and save them at the end of the year? Are you going to, you know, disperse them throughout the year for kids' plays and hockey tournaments and whatever it happens to be? Let's build that in. So, you've got the opportunity to make sure people are actually taking leave.

[00:26:25] **Carmen Arico:** By putting that minimum amount they're taking, they're putting in, but then you're also creating a situation where you might limit any carryover leave. So not necessarily use it or lose it approach, but saying, look guys, if you're not taking your 15 days' worth of leave, you're not carrying over 15 days' worth of leave until next year, you have to take at least eight.

[00:26:46] **Carmen Arico:** So putting those mechanisms in place, which is driving a culture of it's okay to take the leave, you'll be covered, don't worry. You know, Bradly was saying, making sure leaders are saying, it's okay guys, take [00:27:00] your leave, we've got you covered.

[00:27:01] **Linda Mzamane:** And leadership really does play a big role here, and maybe this is something you can talk to Bradly as well, is the role that leadership plays in creating that culture that values and supports leave policies. We talked about adherence earlier on, where does that responsibility lie? Is it, is it squarely at HR? Is it the line managers? Is it leadership? You know, what role does leadership play in creating a culture that values and supports these leave policies?

[00:27:28] **Bradly Howland:** Probably the biggest role of all, actually, to be honest, because whether you're dealing with your people operations or HR teams.

[00:27:35] **Bradly Howland:** Whether you're dealing with line managers, they have to take direction from somewhere. It's important that leaders themselves are role-modelling what that should look like. So it's not just lip service that they're actually putting into practice. So this is something that I remember hearing the story about this one CEO who would without fail at five o'clock, he would pack up and leave to [00:28:00] ensure that people are encouraged to actually pack up and go home.

[00:28:02] **Bradly Howland:** And, uh, one employee then saw him busy taking a meeting in his car after five o'clock and asked the question the next day, well, why are you doing this? And

he says, well, for me, if I don't demonstrate that, even if I know as a CEO, I'm busy. You don't really have that time off you've got to demonstrate for others so that they can see that this is something that's healthy and normal.

[00:28:23] **Bradly Howland:** So what Carmen said as well is equally important. I know for me, um, often what I do with my team members is that I track their leave every single week to see how people are doing. I also monitor team members who I can see are working really, really hard. And, so if I can see that the leave is starting to accrue.

[00:28:41] **Bradly Howland:** If it's 10 days, um, leave that they've got, I immediately call them into my office and say, look, what's happening? What is your plan? How are you getting rest? Because, and it could be something that they would say, well, we're planning a big three-week holiday at the end of the year with the family. Um, I'm trying to save all my leave for that.

[00:28:59] **Bradly Howland:** Perfectly fine, but as [00:29:00] long as you're doing it, you know, this idea that people just pool it and then they wait, for example, when they resign, and then they get that big cash payout, I can promise you, I've done in my career, I think in every single job I did that, and it was the biggest mistake I ever made, because I didn't get that time off.

[00:29:17] **Bradly Howland:** I went straight into the next job without rest. And rest is so, so, so important. So if, if leaders aren't encouraging and advocating for, for different leave provisions, regardless of what it is, to take place, uh, and, and, and respecting it and being very vocal about it, um, it means that line managers, the HR team, or anybody else in between isn't going to see the value in taking the time off.

[00:29:44] **Linda Mzamane:** And I think it's so important what you said earlier about leadership modelling the behaviour, because, you know, leaders are obviously highly driven people who oftentimes will want to, or need to work beyond those working hours, but modelling that behaviour, I mean, as an employee, it's very difficult to get [00:30:00] up and leave your desk when your boss is still sitting in their office working.

[00:30:03] **Linda Mzamane:** You kind of feel this passive pressure to kind of stay on as well. So if you, it almost gives you permission when your leader has also then knows that time that, okay, now it's actually time to go home. And so I've got a question here for you, Carmen what are some practical steps that companies can take to establish or improve their leave policies?

[00:30:24] **Linda Mzamane:** You know, um, Bradly mentioned how important it is to speak to your team members and then be quick with implementation. What practical steps can companies take to, to kind of establish and then improve these policies when, when they are working on them?

[00:30:37] **Carmen Arico:** When you're looking at the leave policies, it's always good to under, to state what the minimum mandated leave requirements are as per local legislation.

[00:30:48] **Carmen Arico:** Anything above that can then be considered enhanced or company-offered leave. But again, you know, speaking to what I mentioned earlier about gender neutrality in South Africa's policy in the Basic [00:31:00] Conditions of Employment Act, it still very much refers to maternity and paternity leave. So making sure that your

policy's terminology also lines up with the legislation so that it's easily translatable and easily understood is considered best practice.

[00:31:14] **Carmen Arico:** Now, certainly we are seeing a drive towards change. Um, there was a landmark case, I think it was back in 2022, where a couple actually, uh, challenged sections of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, I think it was sections 25 and 26, where they wanted to look at changing paternity and maternity leave to parental leave.

[00:31:38] **Carmen Arico:** And offering the same or equal rights to fathers as well to look after newborn children. And I think certainly this is paving the way for that progressive state that South Africa wants to be in. But until we get to that point where that is promulgated in law and is put into place, employers need to make sure that whatever they [00:32:00] are putting in place aligns at a very, very minimum to what is stated in local legislation and anything above that then is considered enhanced.

[00:32:10] **Linda Mzamane:** Life Health Solutions offers 24-hour support for employees and their families. This holistic service includes not only primary healthcare but also counselling, financial wellness, legal services and executive coaching. Thank you for such an enriching discussion, Carmen and Bradley.

[00:32:28] **Linda Mzamane:** It's so exciting to hear about the developments that are taking place in an effort to humanise workplaces. Some of the points that really stood out to me are that firstly, and foremost, busyness is not an accolade. So how can we create a different narrative or culture within businesses? Because at the end of the day, it's important to take leave for rest, recovery, and to focus on other areas of our lives.

[00:32:51] **Linda Mzamane:** This kind of relationship with rest should really flow down from the top where leaders in business set the example. Secondly, progressive leave [00:33:00] policies create room for a more balanced quality of life for employees, which in turn impacts productivity and engagement in the workplace. Lastly, I think that leave policies can be figured out collaboratively by considering the nature of the industry and the needs of employees.

[00:33:17] **Linda Mzamane:** An iterative approach means that policies are fit for purpose and people-centred rather than stagnant guidelines that never come into play in the real world. And so, before we wrap up, I would like to know as we, as we close. Carmen, when are you taking your next paid time off? Do you have any special plans? When are you taking time off?

[00:33:38] **Carmen Arico:** I'm taking time off in December. Um, I have got some friends visiting from the UK, so I'm going to be showing them around the Winelands Oh, divine. And all the beauty that the Western Cape has to offer. So I'm very excited about.

[00:33:51] **Linda Mzamane:** Lovely. Lovely. And you, Bradley, when are you taking your next paid time off?

[00:34:00] **Bradly Howland:** Tomorrow actually. Um, I was hoping to take off a little bit longer, but it's been a very busy period. I think usually the middle of the year is quite busy for most businesses. So it's been a little intense, but I realised it's actually time for me just to reset. So

I'm taking some time off, um, for a week and then again, in October, I'm going to take maybe two to three weeks off and then again in December.

[00:34:21] **Bradly Howland:** And if I do that, other people are encouraged to do the same. So it works.

[00:34:25] **Linda Mzamane:** That's amazing. Thank you both for such an insightful discussion, Carmen and Bradly. I think it's been so exciting to hear about developments taking place and just an effort to really humanise workplaces and realise that people.

[00:34:40] **Linda Mzamane:** There are people behind those employees that we have and, and to recognise that and implement these real-life policies that people can, can really get behind and help them to kind of value where they work as well, because the workplace values them back, which is amazing. With more than 30 years of experience, Life Health Solutions helps businesses make a meaningful, measurable difference

[00:35:03] **Linda Mzamane:** by putting employees at the heart of what they do. Our services span primary healthcare, occupational health and safety, wellness and emergency medical services. For more information, visit lifehealthsolutions.org. If you'd like to hear more insights like these from business and industry leaders, be sure to subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss out on our upcoming episodes.

[00:35:30] **Linda Mzamane:** This podcast is produced by 2Stories for Life Health Solutions. Written by Hanlie van der Merwe and Celeste Jacobs, produced by Carol Williams, with audio editing, engineering and sound design by Kozi Mzimela and Jordyn Toohey. Thanks to MamaMia, Go Legal, UNICEF, Melissa Salazar and Krys Tha Sis for the audio clips and articles used in this episode. For more information, please refer to the show notes.