



## 'Pawternity Leave' – more than just a gimmick?

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In February 2017, Scottish brewer Brewdog announced the introduction of 'Pawternity Leave' – a scheme whereby employees can take one week's paid leave, in addition to their standard annual leave entitlement, if they adopt a puppy or a rescue dog.

Brewdog announced this new scheme not only internally, to its staff, but also to the world at large via a press release. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the announcement garnered a high degree of media attention and comment. The question is however, whether schemes such as this are more than just headline grabbing gimmicks and actually afford hardworking employees a genuine benefit.

At the time of the pawternity leave announcement, Brewdog was in the process of unveiling its new North American premises. Sceptics of the pawternity leave scheme suggested that its launch was curiously well timed and simply intended to draw attention to the US unveiling. That said, Brewdog has always been a dog-friendly, people-oriented employer, allowing its employees to take their pets into the office with them since its inception.

While Brewdog's pooch-friendly perk is somewhat unusual, innovative employee-benefit schemes are actually nothing new. In 2016, New York-based online Retailer, Boxed, was praised when it announced that it would start contributing to the cost of its employees' weddings. The Company firmly rejected any suggestion that the scheme was introduced so as to attract public attention, stating that there were many, cheaper ways to do that.

A number of other schemes have made the headlines over the years including Apple and Facebook who offer to contribute up to \$20,000 to the cost of egg freezing for their female employees, Airbnb which provides staff with a \$2,000 travel allowance, Google which famously offers a range of on-site perks,

including ping pong tables, haircuts, massages, laundry facilities and swimming pools and Transferwise, which takes its whole team on all expenses paid holidays.

So what are schemes such as these all about? Well, it's widely acknowledged that happy staff are more productive. Employee happiness has been found to boost productivity by 12% and, in turn, unhappy workers have been found to be 10% less productive (Source: University of Warwick). Brewdog reports that having dogs in the office makes everyone more relaxed and Boxed has commented that its commitment to contributing to staff weddings was met with high-fiving and tears of joy.

So, as long as the 'perk', however unusual, is genuinely beneficial to employees, should it matter how quirky it might seem? According to a survey of more than 1,000 people carried out by Glassdoor, a recruiting website, more than a third of employees admit that perks and benefits are amongst their top considerations before accepting a new job.

The issue however, is that while a gimmick might attract a candidate in the first instance, keeping them satisfied is likely to require something more long-term. Employees stay where they feel valued, where they can see the potential for future career development and where their culture and values align with those of their employer. So, while having a think about a creative approach to employee benefits can do no harm and might afford you some short term reputational and recruitment gains, it's the bigger stuff that's going to make the difference.

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