

CASE STUDY

**GLOBAL:  
THE  
FOUR-DAY  
WEEK  
MOVEMENT**

## THE BRIEF

In early 2018, Perpetual Guardian founder Andrew Barnes announced that to help improve employee wellbeing and raise productivity, the company was going to trial a Four-Day Week.

After reading about the serious disparity between time spent at work and actual productive output in the Economist, Andrew decided to test productivity and staff engagement levels in his own 240-person business.

Alexander PR was engaged to help promote the conversation about this different way of thinking about work and raise awareness around the future of work.

## HOW ALEXANDER PR HELPED

**“NOTHING OF THIS SCALE HAD BEEN DONE BEFORE. IT WAS A BLANK CANVAS TO PLAY ON.”**

Independent qualitative and quantitative academics were engaged to measure the impact the initiative had on employees and business output, to give tangible insights for leadership and board consideration before (potentially) full implementation.

Nothing of this scale had been done before. It was a blank canvas to play on.

The game-changing initiative propelled the New Zealand brand to global recognition with media from 60+ countries reporting to a worldwide audience of over 4.5 billion people.

Staff stress levels went from 45 percent before the trial to 38 percent afterwards; work-life balance rose from 54 percent to 78 percent; and team engagement and empowerment rose from 68 percent to 86 percent.

Crucially, productivity levels were maintained over the four days.

The success meant the Four-Day Week was implemented as permanent opt-in policy in November 2018.

The conversation hasn't stopped there. Businesses and individuals across the world are contacting the team regularly to talk about this new concept of working.

# THE RESULTS

The results were above anything the company had imagined: Job performance was maintained while staff stress levels dropped to 38 percent (they were measured at 45 percent pre-trial). Work-life balance rose from 54 percent to 78 percent, and feelings of empowerment grew from 68 percent to 86 percent.

Staff also talked about having more time to focus on personal health, quality family time, personal hobbies and giving back to the community. In the business, teams felt that they were functioning better, more productively and more efficiently, in part because of the trial's design as a staff-led process.

Teams had to collaborate well to figure out how to meet their productivity targets in order for each member to get their weekly day off, and as a result, unproductive practices such as overlong meetings and personal use of phones and internet decreased (as one example, surfing of the five most popular websites in New Zealand dropped 35 percent over the course of the trial, as staff were incentivised to focus on their work).

The infographic features the logos for 'perpetual guardian' and 'coulthard barnes.' at the top. The central text reads 'THE FOUR DAY WEEK' and 'ENGAGED MORE THAN 4.5 BILLION PEOPLE'. To the left, a blue box states 'AUSTRALIA AND EUROPE GOVERNMENT CONVERSATIONS' with an icon of two hands shaking, and 'MORE THAN 50 ENQUIRIES FROM BUSINESSES AROUND THE GLOBE'. To the right, another blue box shows '11,500+ SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS', '73 COUNTRIES', and '3,500+ NEWS PIECES', each with a globe icon. Below these are two more blue boxes: one listing various topics like 'THE GENDER PAY GAP', 'SPARKING CONVERSATIONS AROUND..', 'WORK LIFE BALANCE', 'MENTAL HEALTH', 'MILLENNIAL ATTITUDES', 'PRODUCTIVITY', 'TRANSPORT & INFRASTRUCTURE', and 'WORKING PARENTS'; the other listing 'CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS: BUSINESS PRODUCTIVITY GUIDELINES', 'MANAGEMENT AND STAFF BUY-IN', 'FLEXIBLE COMPANY CULTURE', and 'REGULAR REVIEW OF OUTPUT' with a magnifying glass icon. At the bottom, a grey bar states 'FOUR WEEK IMPLEMENTED ON OPT IN BASIS'.



\*Percentages indicative of scale method used in Auckland University of Technology research  
 \*Findings consistent with qualitative research by University of Auckland Business School

On the back of the trial’s success came extensive media interest and coverage which sparked a wider global conversation around mental health, work-life balance, the gender pay gap, millennial attitudes, transport and infrastructure, climate change, flexibility and productivity.

Within the business the trial was a major win, and the evidence combined with legal opinion supported the permanent implementation of the Four-Day Week on an opt-in basis.

Because of the strong focus on giving back within the company, it was also decided that anyone opting to work a Four-Day Week would spend one of their days off each quarter volunteering in their community for a cause they care about.

In New Zealand, at least 18 companies have already implemented the Four-Day Week.

Overseas, it has been implemented by at least 39 organisations in eight countries. In total, 440 NZ companies employing 150k+ workers have requested the white paper, out of more than 2,000 global requests. Most of the country’s largest manufacturers, banks, charities, retailers and government ministries have requested it.

Other notable outcomes include:

- The New Zealand initiative was mentioned at the 2019 World Economic Forum in Davos;
- The Four-Day Week was a finalist in the Fast Company 'World Changing Ideas' programme;
- The founder was invited by Hon Grant Robertson to present his ideas at the Future of Work Tripartite forum and for the Wellbeing Budget;
- Oxford University has signalled its interest in making Andrew Barnes an advisory board member of the Wellbeing Research Centre at Oxford;
- The company developed authentic interview content (video, podcast, infographic and opinion pieces) with key staff, leadership and stakeholders, and a detailed 49-page white paper which has been downloaded by over 2,400 companies in 73 countries. In total, 440 NZ companies employing 150k+ workers have requested the paper, including most of the largest manufacturers, banks, charities, retailers and government ministries;
- Perpetual Guardians employer brand has been significantly boosted with more high-quality CVs being submitted;
- There were significantly more than 3,500 news articles and 11,500 [social media posts](#) during the first three phases alone;
- Perpetual Guardian was visited in March 2019 by 30 MBA students from Yale University's School of Management;
- Resulted in a TEDX talk for founder Andrew Barnes;
- The conversation continues, with PG leadership being invited to speak about their progress in the UK, Ireland, US and Australia;
- Cultural differences between countries are evident but even though some countries have been sceptical - even the [notoriously hard-working Japanese](#) are showing interest.
- A book deal with an internationally renowned publishing house is in place as well.

It's not often that a New Zealand initiative can shape the agenda of the world. Perpetual Guardian has started this conversation and will add even more depth to it over the coming years with the formation of a Global Flexible Working Foundation.

The company is helping the teams, one staff member at a time, become happier and more productive. Its founder Andrew Barnes believes that the world cannot rely on governments alone to create positive change – and that companies can and must be that change.