

## Transcript: Kathryn van der Merwe with Rafael Epstein – ABC Radio Melbourne Drive

**Rafael Epstein:** Masks will be coming off Friday at midnight, so too the recommendation to work from home. It doesn't look like people will be flooding back into the city straight away though. At ANZ, Kathryn van der Merwe is group executive for Talent & Culture. Kathryn. Good afternoon.

**Kathryn van der Merwe:** Good afternoon.

**Rafael Epstein:** Are you guys flooding back into the office next week do you think?

**Kathryn van der Merwe:** We hope so!

**Rafael Epstein:** What sort of numbers?

**Kathryn van der Merwe:** Look, it's really hard to tell but we're certainly welcoming people back in from Monday. We know there is a bit of pent-up energy there and I think that's a bit different this time this year than it was even a year ago, the desire for people to get back together after having been apart for so long, I think has increased a little over the recent months so I think we'll see significant numbers back in throughout the week next week.

**Rafael Epstein:** What does significant mean? Will you be back to regular compliment within in a few weeks do you think?

**Kathryn van der Merwe:** It's hard to tell. Last time around when we were welcoming people back in it was several months of people adjusting to new ways of working. What we're saying to our people this time is, and we have been reinforcing this for a long time, we really believe in the importance of coming together and connecting together in person. Particularly for certain kinds of work around collaborating and innovating, creating alignments and developing particularly for new starters and certain cohorts so it's an important part of the way that we work. We were planning from the back end of last year to have everybody back in from February, so we've just pushed that back a month it turns out, so that's a good thing. But we'll be saying, we want you back in regularly and frequently but it's up to you and your team to figure out exactly what that's going to look like. So I suspect there will be a period of experimentation, as different teams figure out a rhythm that works for them, balancing the needs of us and the business and the team as well as their individual needs.

**Rafael Epstein:** As we heard from Telstra, looking at maybe on average people working two days a week from home, do you think your bank would settle at something similar?

**Kathryn van der Merwe:** I do think that probably is about the way it'll end up. We're really trying to say about half the time in the office, half the time from home. And that might vary for different teams and that might vary from week to week depending on the work to be done. You might have some intense periods where you're together every day, and actually of course there will be people that do want to be in five days a week and we'll always welcome them in if that's the case. Not everyone is set up at home to work well and work productively and some people are just sick of it. So we'll certainly welcome people back in five days if that's what they want to do as well.

**Rafael Epstein:** Do you end up compensating people more, if they're at home half the time do you think over the long term there will be a little bit of extra wage of salary so people can set up at home? Is that a feature of the conversation yet?

**Kathryn van der Merwe:** No I don't think so, I think there is give and take around that. We did help support people to set up two years ago, recognising we needed to help people set up safely to work from home, so a lot of that work is done actually. A lot of what has helped people to stay productive is some of the advances in technology and some of the tools that we're able to use to have effective video conferences and collaborate together. But there are also the savings in a commute, for example time and cost, so it really does seem to balance itself out.

**Rafael Epstein:** Do you see it as radically different? Alex at Telstra was seeing it as more of an evolution rather than revolution to have people working from home two days a week. Is it a big change for ANZ do you think, where you'll end up to have people working from home?

**Kathryn van der Merwe:** We've always had flexible work practises, but I think what is different is the scale and the duration over which we've proven we've been able to do that. But that for most of our workforce has been about remote working mostly, throughout the last couple of years, which means everybody is at home so there has been a level playing field there and everybody is connecting via the video conference facility. What we're moving to now actually brings another degree of complexity, I think, that hybrid or blended way of working, because it's about figuring out what is the best way to use your time when you're working together in the office versus the time that you're working reflectively or on individual work. Figuring out how to have a productive team meeting when some of the people will be in the room together and others will continue to connect from home on their own devices. Some of those things will require another set of learning and adapting for all of us and our leaders, to help navigate that so we are seeing that as a significant change. I think the other thing is people have had very different lived experiences over the last two years, so they're approaching this as another change they have to adapt to. Settling kids back into school, the prospect of returning back to workplaces for some it's really exciting and they can't wait, but for others it's really daunting and they've gotten quite used to working in a really isolated way and in some ways have felt safe at home during this time. So I think we have to meet our diverse workforce where they're at and recognise that is a change and support them and support our leaders to learn to work in this blended way to really be productive and deliver great outcomes.

**Rafael Epstein:** Really interesting speaking to you Kathryn, thanks so much.

**Kathryn van der Merwe:** Thank you so much, talk soon.

**Rafael Epstein:** Kathryn van de Merwe is the group executive for Talent & Culture at ANZ.