

#WORKSCHOOLHOURS



Case Study Interview with Vanessa Ogle. Founder of Enseo

Vanessa is a serial entrepreneur. She founded Enseo in 2000 and it became one of the fastest growing technology companies in the digital entertainment market. "If you've ever watched Netflix in a hotel room by pushing Netflix on the remote", that's Enseo. The solutions grew and they also "created a safety button for women working in hotels, so that they could hit a button if they had a problem in a hotel room and then help would come running." This product was parlayed into the education system in the United States, "so if there's a problem in a school room or a classroom, they can push a button."

Enseo has served more than a billion guests in hotel rooms, and have protected more than half a million women as they have gone to work. The business was on the Inc 500, and on the Inc 5000 list five times. Forbes gave Enseo an award for the most innovative place to work in the world. They have been on the Entrepreneur magazine and Entrepreneur 360 as well as the Financial Times, and the Financial Times Fast 100. Vanessa is an incredible woman and I have become a huge fan!

What led you to adopt a #workschoolhours type approach at Enseo?

We started adopting this concept out of necessity because I got pregnant. I was running the company. I said, "we're going to whack out the office next door and we're going to build a nursery next door. And I'm going to have someone on site to help me. I'm going to bring the baby to work. When I travel, the babies are going to travel with me. And that's what we're going to do." So I raised my children at the office... I raised them, brought them with me every day. The woman that I hired to help take care of my kids, she also started having children in this timeframe, so then she would bring her kids to work every day too. So we ended up having a whole pile of kids in the office. It really worked beautifully."

What about when the kids started school?

My day became actually less efficient. Because I was worried about getting back and forth to school, it was more challenging having to do projects, and also there was this huge guilt factor of: what wasn't getting done? Did I have time to make breakfast? Or did I remember to pack the 15 things of the special day for the class? I was less efficient in my day. I just was.

So, what we started doing was I started shifting my schedule so that I didn't start work until the kids were at school. I shifted my schedule by about an hour and a half in the mornings. I took the kids to school, then I went on my run, and then I cleaned up, and then I came to the office. I found that I was clearheaded. I was more efficient. I was effective. I was happier, which meant I was a better manager and a better thinker and a more strategic thinker. I handled challenges better at the office because I was in a better frame of mind. Then I would pack up, go home. Then I would feed them and put them to bed, and then I would go back to work again.



How did you onboard other Mums?

So it worked so well for me, being able to shift my schedule to take care of my children. If I could do it, anybody could do it. For sure. I was leaving my children's elementary school one day, and there was a woman who was a mom, had kids my kids' age, and she was in the front of the school. And she looked at her phone and she was just crestfallen, just visibly crestfallen, and her eyes welled up with tears. It was super sad. I was like, "Hey, are you okay? What's wrong?" And she's like, "No. This jerk, who's a recruiter, he won't even take me as a client because he says I've been lazy because I've been raising children. And little does he know, I am so overqualified for that job. I used to run a factory in New Jersey and I had the hundreds of employees." Anyway, she was ridiculously overqualified for the job she was applying for, but the recruiter wouldn't even take her as a client. And I was like, "I'm sorry, you used to run a factory? So are you interested in going back to work?" She like, "Yes." I was like, "Call me. Here's my card."

It took her a while to call me, but she did. I hired her. That was 10, 12 years ago and she still works for Enseo today. She runs all of our installations, all of our operations. While being a mom, while working a mom's schedule, she has installed over a quarter million hotel rooms with the most leading-edge technology that is ever put in hotel rooms anywhere in the world. She has run the services organisation. She's run installations. *She's one of our highest performing employees that we have ever had.* And we let her run it on her schedule. She came in. She did her job. She left in time to pick the kids up and to take them to basketball or volleyball or whatever.

But there was not a single time where she did not get her job done. And in fact, when we first hired her, she was a program manager. And she was one of several program managers all doing the same job. And what we found was, was that *even though she worked school hours, mom hours, she outperformed the guys 10:1. 10:1.* It didn't surprise me, because who can spin plates better than a mom? Nobody. No one can multitask like a mom. So it was just case in point of what an opportunity it was for us.

How did you expand this?

Much like today, there was a labor shortage. I needed qualified, talented laborers. So I started looking around at the PTA (Parent Teacher Association), realising we have these working moms who really are underutilised. They have so much talent, they have so much energy. They would love to be working, but only if they don't have to leave their children behind to do so.

I have a team of executives that have school-age children or have had school-aged children. And the reason that they are all on my team was because I gave them an opportunity to be their whole authentic self, be the mom they wanted to be and to be the professional that they wanted to be. In fact, *these women are outstanding, and they could work at the biggest law firms, the best IT companies, the biggest banks in the world. But instead, I got them on our budget, because of the ability to be flexible and to be their whole authentic selves.*



How did this help your business?

It's real. I mean, we were able to lever up talent and to get tremendous talent on board. As a smaller organisation, *that helped us grow the business phenomenally. That's one of the reasons why we grew so fast* and we had so many people that felt comfortable bringing their ideas forward, because they felt received. And if you feel received, you're willing to give new ideas a shot. *We hired the best person for the job and allowed them to work at their schedule, their way. And we got a better result.* If you have a culture that is about results and an environment and excitement, of wanting to work and wanting to have joint results as a team, you will get those results as a team no matter what hours someone works. And cross-culturally, if you hire someone and you chain them to their desk, and they're miserable and they don't want to be there, they're not going to be effective and you're not going to get the results for your business. You're certainly not going to get innovation and you're not going to have anybody do anything other than the five things they were told to do that would make your business grow better or faster. That's my opinion.

For the employer, you get access to a workforce who is eager, they are grateful, and they work hard and they also work smart. And that is *a fantastic workforce to be able to tap into*. That's a huge benefit.

So staff wellbeing, as we've all seen, it's so important. It's important to retention, it's important to innovation, it's important to the corporate performance. If we focus, as employers, on staff wellbeing, we get better outlays and better performance metrics for the business. *So we don't have to sacrifice business performance and business financials for staff wellbeing. Helping and focusing on staff wellbeing improves business metrics and performance.*

Any other points Vanessa? (and you can probably tell by now that I am in awe of Vanessa!!)

Yeah, so Ellen, I mean, one of the things that's so important is this cannot be something that you just give lip service to. You can't say we want to do this, and yet at the end of the day, the person who goes home at three o'clock to take their kids to soccer or pick their kids up from school, that they're sneered at, and they're passed over for promotion. And at the end of the day, people are valuing the school hours or the hours put in more than the work performance. This really has to be a wholehearted environment from the company, where you look at the contribution of the employee more than what their schedule is. And then you will get great results.

To any manager out there who's looking at this is an option, I would urge you to consider: if you could have a workforce that you had never tapped into, who wanted to do your job, who was smart, who was talented, who could multitask, who could communicate with five people at the same time, wouldn't that be your ideal workforce? I'm pretty sure that would be your ideal workforce. If so, *all you have to do is consider using #workschoolhours, as a combination, and you will have the opportunity to reap some tremendous benefits.*

