



A WITNESS TO STRENGTH, RESILIENCE & DETERMINATION

An employee's perspective written by Corinne Kavounas, Director of Marketing and Communications, BSI Corporate Benefits

“Leadership is not about a title or a designation. It’s about impact, influence, and inspiration.” – Robin Sharma

We are living in a period termed the “Great Resignation” which can merely be defined as a time where roughly 33 million Americans have quit their jobs since the spring of 2021. Some people were either forced to leave their place of employment due to personal responsibilities such as taking care of children, or because at some point in the aftermath of the pandemic they realized what they were doing was both unfulfilling and unrewarding. The pandemic caused a lot of upheaval in many facets of our lives. However, as we start to return to a new normal, it is obvious some lessons learned throughout the pandemic and ways of doing business have become the foundation for what’s to come. Companies who work towards improving employee work/life balance will, in my opinion, prevail over companies who are unwilling to bend.

During the past three years I have been not only an employee of BSI Corporate Benefits, but also a witness to the firm’s transformation. In December 2019, BSI started to clear the path for the next chapter of the firm’s history. BSI offered what I define these days as standard benefits. BSI provided medical, dental, vision, 401k plan, paid time off, along with additional perks such as flex Fridays during the summer, employee recognition, stress relieving activities during open enrollment (our busiest time of the year), free healthy snacks and more. They wanted to do more for employees’ but at the time were focused on streamlining internal processes that would in turn equate to better workflow, time management, improved communication, productivity, less stress, and team morale. Streamlining internal processes seemed like the perfect plan to help the team and the company move forward. At the start of the new year, Director of Operations, Kyle McLemore spearheaded training sessions every Thursday to work on our core workflow and internal processes. Little did anyone know that in a few short weeks that plan would be turned upside down and would be coupled with trying to navigate the day-to-day amidst a global pandemic.

On Thursday, March 12th, 2020, a message marked as high importance came to the top of our email. The email was from our CEO, Tony DaRe who was in Michigan meeting with one of our clients. After hearing more reports about the spread of the coronavirus, Tony listed a set of parameters to keep employees safe and to be prepared to conduct work remotely in the coming days. He signed off the message “lastly, this thing is changing by the day so prepare yourself for updates, changes, mandates, etc. any questions call me, and we will figure it out together.” From that day forward, the executive team met every day to assess current information surrounding the coronavirus pandemic. Their focus was to keep employees safe, informed, engaged, and provide full transparency during a very uncertain time. Vice President of Employee & Community Engagement, Valerie Lewis (Val) along with Tony took on the task of keeping employees engaged by implementing a Monday morning update meeting and a virtual happy hour every Friday. Team members were encouraged to take multiple breaks throughout the day to go for a walk, connect with team members, family and friends, exercise or just have downtime.

As time went on it became apparent the team not only functioned well at home but excelled at working remotely. Ironically, productivity went up and team members started to communicate more effectively together. The new way of doing business, coupled with Thursday trainings allowed us to fine tune internal processes and provided teams a way to connect on a more personal level. Connection is perhaps the most crucial component in building a productive and efficient workplace simply because connected teams drive collaboration, cultivate healthy working relationships, and promote knowledge-sharing. The more connected we became as a team, the more efficient our workplace became.

Throughout the first nine months of the pandemic, BSI implemented a new set of rules and way of doing business. I am grateful for a lot of things, but during that time I was most grateful to work for a company that valued their employees more than profit. If anyone follows BSI on social media, you will have a glimpse into the kind of heart BSI has for their employees and community. The pandemic brought to light a unique perspective on the company I was privileged to work for and who was at the helm steering the ship. After having a record year in 2020, the focus shifted from efficiency to employee growth, development, and retention. To ensure BSI maintained this new level of performance, Val was promoted to Chief Operating Officer and was dedicated to providing agency-wide leadership, management, vision, and the execution of growth-focused strategies. With extensive experience in employee benefits, creating a positive corporate culture, and advocating for clients on a human and financial level, it was obvious Val would take employee development and growth to a new level, while focusing on employee retention.

“What happens to one of us, matters to all of us.” - Tony DaRe

In 2021, BSI was recognized as one of the “Best Workplaces” in the nation by Inc. The pandemic helped many team members realize what it was like to work for a company who consistently had their back on a professional, financial, and personal level and a company that also had integrity, strength to do what is right, and to help team members find balance. The company name “BSI” itself stands for balance, strength, and integrity. However, it took a pandemic for us to get to a place where it all came full circle. As time went on, team members were given more freedom to do their job, to have more flexibility, and were offered the choice to work from home or to go into the office. There were so many positives that stemmed from the pandemic, but one of the most noteworthy was the fact that collectively and collaboratively, little by little we have a team environment that is more like a family than anything else. There is a saying at BSI, “what happens to one of us, matters to all of us.” Essentially, we pull together to get things done and are there to support one another when needed. The company has done an amazing job with listening to what the team needs and wants. They have implemented changes based on team feedback and are constantly looking for ways to help team members grow and succeed. Through trainings, mentoring, personal guidance, and additional perks added throughout the course of the past several months including paid team lunches, profit sharing, tuition reimbursement, having a running tab for BSI employees at a local coffee shop, to giving additional days off throughout the year, BSI is without a doubt a leader when it comes to benefits and perks provided to employees.

This past fall Val gave a presentation at the SHRM Lehigh Valley conference, relaying what she has learned since the pandemic and how BSI has tailored benefits and employee perks based on current needs and wants of BSI employees. The title of her presentation was “engaging employees in today’s environment: what are they looking for?” She covered topics such as employee engagement, the importance of communicating with your team on an ongoing basis, employee wellness and helping team members find work/life balance. Val provided fifteen of the most effective strategies for employee engagement and asked participants for feedback regarding what has and has not worked for them to retain employees, but also what have they done to keep employees happy and engaged. Out of five reasons why employees left a job during the great resignation, the top three were work-life balance, career advancement opportunities and compensation/benefits/values. BSI may specialize in employee benefits from an insurance perspective, but they also excel at employee benefits from a personal development, growth, personal and financial wellness perspective. How BSI has navigated through the pandemic to help employees manage work/life balance and build team morale, it is no wonder why during our last round of hiring, we had more great candidates apply for open positions than ever before. The firm’s collective executive strategy to ensure employees have the tools and resources they need on a personal and professional level is perhaps the secret sauce to BSI’s success and growth. BSI is unlike any company I have worked for, and I am grateful to be a witness to the company’s strength, resilience and determination to be innovative, creative and think outside the box to help team members grow personally and professionally and to live a balanced life.