



## The client view - GQ|Littler meets Erica Humphrey of Salesforce

By **Raoul Parekh** - 30 July 2020

*GQ|Littler in conversation with Erica Humphrey of Salesforce.*



Erica is Senior Corporate Counsel, Labour & Employment, EMEA at [Salesforce](#), a leading cloud-based CRM and enterprise solutions software provider, where she started five years ago.

Before joining Salesforce, Erica worked in private practice at IBB Law in Uxbridge. Erica works in a team of three employment lawyers based in London, Dublin and Paris and supports more than 10,000 employees across the region. Erica and her team have been working with [Littler](#) in Europe for several years.

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**Raoul: What has been the most difficult issue for Salesforce's HR and legal teams in their response to the pandemic?**

*Erica:* This pandemic has provided truly unique challenges which we'd never dealt with before and so we were all learning on the job. In addition to that, the speed at which everything changed was remarkable and we had to shift the parameters every day to deal with the new challenges.

One of the challenges which speed brought was understanding which stakeholders you needed to engage with on the multiple issues coming into our team. For example, it became vital to identify who our "business critical employees" were for the purposes of our office closure. This is not an everyday request, so we had to work out who would be involved in that decision-making process, before we could actually make those decisions.

With the altering degrees of lockdown severity in different countries, Salesforce had to navigate the decision-making tree in a novel way when things were moving so fast. One of the challenges with this was the clash between local government guidance, insights from medical experts, company policy and individual needs. Although we considered local approaches initially, we decided to take a global approach early on by closing our offices very quickly. This provided us with a clearer foundation once everything was shut down.

However, as we move to lifting lockdown restrictions, we plan to take a city by city approach across the globe. We recently launched the product [Work.com](#) which is a set of solutions and resources to help businesses and communities reopen and recover safely and responsibly. Our strategy has been to engage local leaders to understand where employees stand and if they want to return to the office. Dealing with local leaders, employee workforces, and lifted lockdown restrictions has allowed us to determine our top three target offices in the region for our phased reopening.

**Raoul: How will the planned office safety measures change Salesforce's culture? Is this a positive, or something you want to guard against?**

*Erica:* We're focused on the physical and mental health of our employees and their families whether they are working from home or back in the office. Our offices are our pride and joy at Salesforce and are geared to be collaborative workplaces. Here in the UK, we opened an innovation centre on the 37th floor of [Salesforce Tower](#). This large open space has Neighborhood seating (essentially, hot desking) to facilitate innovation between employees and customers. Of course, we have had to pause this for now, but we aim to continue the collaboration and innovation in different ways to keep our employees, customers, partners, and the community safe.

**Raoul: Is this culture being preserved?**

*Erica:* Our business was very well set up for success to work in this way, because we have a large population of remote employees as part of our Ohana@Home program. We embraced the new working arrangements and have moved to understand how this can become a permanent part of our culture. Looking forward, our focus becomes: "how do we continue our collaborative culture, while managing the risks and furthering our support for our employees working from home?"

**Raoul: How are your employees responding to the planned return to work, and how have you been communicating with them while the office has been closed?**

*Erica:* We've been very fortunate to have the technology in place to support our employees through the transition to working from home. Employees have responded positively to the planned return to work and many are very much looking forward to getting back to the office. We developed [Work.com](#) to not only support our customers and communities' return to their workplaces but also our own strategy in bringing employees back safely. We've had a stream of communications to employees whilst the offices have been closed, including weekly meetings with the executive leadership team, daily B-well meetings with inspirational speakers and other various forms of ongoing communications.

**Raoul: Did you have to adapt your communication plans as the lockdown progressed?**



*Erica:* We are communicating with our employees the same way that we did three months ago. This is the new normal. We want to continue to have people feel connected to the company, encourage a flow of information and focus on the wellbeing of our employees.

**Raoul: What tips can you give to other firms to manage office re-openings during the pandemic?**

*Erica:* Plan well but be agile as things are changing rapidly, prioritize, use technology, gauge employee sentiment and most importantly, overcommunicate.

**Raoul: What changes (if any) from the pandemic / lockdown do you want to keep for good?**

*Erica:* I think the workplace will become more flexible, and we'll see employees intentionally taking a hybrid approach. We're leading with the philosophy of work from anywhere.

More personally, as a mother of a one and three-year old I have always worked flexibly with a normal pattern of two days at home and three in the office. We must work hard to establish a framework that allows people to feel connected even without the physical proximity we relied on in the past, and I believe we can and will do that.

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If you need any advice on the themes discussed in this interview please get in touch with your usual GQ|Littler contact or email [info@gqlittler.com](mailto:info@gqlittler.com).