



WORDS: ÁILÍN QUINLAN

A DRIVING FORCE AT LINKEDIN

The night before we talked, **Sharon McCooey** was attending her parents' 50th wedding anniversary celebrations in Monaghan – but she was back at her desk in Dublin by 8.30am the following morning and ready to chat about the company she loves.

McCooey's position is an enviable one – she heads up a thriving business which has not only expanded hugely from a workforce of just 3 to 1200 employees in 7 years, but enjoys the kind of consistently high employee satisfaction

and retention rates which would turn the face of many a HR director green.

"I call it my dream job – it causes me to jump out of bed every day," declares the Head of LinkedIn in Ireland, Senior Director of the company's

International Relations department and founding member of LinkedIn in Ireland back in 2010.

"I love the job because it's about relationships and people – LinkedIn is my dream because it is a

Linked



SHARON MCCOOEY →



combination of networking with people and technology,” explains McCooley, a qualified accountant who now heads up LinkedIn’s dynamic, highly motivated and young workforce – the average age of LinkedIn employees in Dublin is around 31.

Since 2010, the Monaghan native, who previously worked in the US multinational sector for many years, has, however, also overseen the launch of LinkedIn branches in no fewer than 10 countries around the world – Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden to name but a few.

McCooley is the acknowledged driving force which has established LinkedIn as one of the major tech players in Dublin’s crowded tech scene.

As one of LinkedIn’s first hires she has personally overseen this period of immense growth and change, helping the company grow from a tiny staff seven years ago to a formidable workforce of 1,200-and-growing which works across all product lines, supporting more than 50 markets, from the UK as far as Turkey and South Africa.

The phenomenal success of the company she believes, is down to a handful of factors – firstly, says McCooley, it’s really all about hiring the right kind of people.

“There’s a snowball effect from getting great people, who then attract more great people and they all do great things,” she observes.

The other big reason for LinkedIn’s success, she believes, is the fact that the company is a purpose-driven organisation.

“Our vision is connecting professionals around the world to make them more productive and successful, so when we talk about our



successes, we talk about how many people either find jobs on LinkedIn, funding through LinkedIn for their business, or, indeed, new business through LinkedIn.

“We get told these stories by people who have benefited from LinkedIn.”

Put simply, LinkedIn connects the world’s professionals to make them more productive and successful and transforms the ways companies hire, market and sell. The company’s vision is to create economic opportunity for every member of the global workforce through the ongoing development of the world’s first Economic Graph. It has more than 467 million members, boasts offices worldwide, and reports McCooley, globe-trotting LinkedIn employees regularly get told first-hand about just how their day-to-day work impacts positively on the lives of others. People don’t

just message LinkedIn with their appreciative comments, they’re also willing to do it face-to-face, she says.

“When any of the workforce walks through an airport with, for example, a LinkedIn logo on a bag, or on a t-shirt carrying the logo, people literally come up and tell us how LinkedIn has changed their lives. This happens all the time and that’s a great motivator,” McCooley declares.

“We have very high retention rates. We run employee satisfaction surveys twice a year and they tell us that employee satisfaction is very high because of the effect that their work is having on other peoples’ lives.”

As we all know, millennial employees are a restless bunch. They tend to move around a lot – but LinkedIn’s retention rates buck that trend, says McCooley – primarily she says, because of what she terms ‘purpose’.

“We’re a **people business**, so collaboration is very important...”



LinkedIn

“There’s huge take up of this and it’s always a fascinating day! “Parents are fascinated by what their children do and they have often been a great influence on their children’s careers, so after visiting LinkedIn they feel more equipped to provide advice.

“This further improves their mentoring relationship with their children.”

McCooley is expecting a particularly high turnout for the November event, because of the fact that the company’s state-of-the-art new offices, LinkedIn’s EMEA HQ Wilton Place, was formally opened recently.

The new office space is bound to widen the eyes of past generations who would probably never have imagined the kind of workplace LinkedIn employees now enjoy.

Designed to reflect the energy and vitality of its millennial workforce, the company’s new offices boast barista stations, a music room, a gym with a personal trainer, 300 bicycle spaces, big windows, open spaces and a plethora of attractive meeting areas for employee collaboration.

LinkedIn’s Dublin base is located, as McCooley has commented previously, “at the heart of Europe’s digital ecosystem,” she added at the time that its location “means that we are ideally placed for the future.”

So it’s no surprise that she describes the sheer number of employees who have so far brought their parents and friends in to see the new building as “staggering:”

“Our employees are very proud of where they work,” she says simply.

The huge new building says McCooley, is essentially a workplace “that looks to the future.” Much like LinkedIn itself.

“Our employees see how they can influence the lives of others.”

That’s way out there in terms of contributing to employee satisfaction rates, she says. Another big factor is the company’s culture which makes LinkedIn, says McCooley simply, “a very nice place to work:”

“We’re a people business, so collaboration is very important, as is humour and not taking ourselves too seriously – and having fun while we work.”

And then there’s the clear career path.

The Dublin workforce covers a range of functions, from sales and marketing, engineering, data insights, regional leadership roles to HR and finance, and employees are given every opportunity to upskill and progress up the corporate ladder.

“We have a learning platform free to employees, a learning and development team and a wide range of upskilling and training courses; there’s significant employee movement around the company’s global network. “Even within Dublin, people move regularly in their jobs,” she reports.

“We’re a growth company so it’s easy to facilitate an upward trajectory for our employees.”

On top of all of that there’s the hugely popular LinkedIn in-day. This is one day a month when every LinkedIn employee gets a free day from work to do something that’s important to them.

In May, for example, there’s Giving Day which is all about volunteering to work for your chosen charity. This coming November, the company will host a special Parent Day, when employees’ parents are invited to come to the company’s offices. They get training in LinkedIn, meet colleagues and management and have lunch – McCooley’s parents participated in this a few years ago, and are set for a return visit.

“This is a very interesting one, because some 50 countries are represented in the workforce at our office in Dublin, and a very large proportion of parents turn up!

“They get a tour, some training about LinkedIn, get to meet their children’s colleagues and managers, get to ask questions, meet other parents and have lunch.