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Lifestyle trumps commute in the new-found corporate heartland

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More than 1800 people file into Endeavour Energy's head office in Western Sydney each day.

The vast majority of them (more than 90 per cent) hail from the surrounding suburbs, travelling a short distance to work in the sprawling corporate office, which is currently being refurbished.



Endeavour Energy is taking advantage of operating in western Sydney, an area where people love to live and work without the hassle of commuting long distances.

The company is thriving, with a possible recession facing the economy not changing the fact that customers still need to turn the lights on.

“There has been a vast shift in how people feel about careers in western Sydney in recent years,” Melissa Irwin, general manager of people, culture and transformation says. “Making sure that people can work close to where they live and not have to come into the city creates a much more sustainable lifestyle.”

Time to fit in extracurricular activities is important to parents, while the ability to work from home matters to others, she says.

“It’s increasingly important to jobseekers to find workplaces that offer flexibility these days, and employees need to realise that flexibility means different things to different people. People don’t want to spend two hours commuting into the city and home again. People can see that’s just not sustainable,” Irwin says.

The energy provider services more than 2.7 million people living and working across Sydney's Greater West and surrounding areas.

[<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5cu2w>]



Less commuting means more family time for Melissa Doueihi, Endeavour Energy's head of strategy and innovation.

Like many companies, it's grappling with a talent shortage. Vacancies persist across a range of roles, including engineering, electricians, technology and project managers.

Endeavour Energy's head of strategy and innovation role appealed to Melissa Doueihi, who traded in a two-hour commute into Sydney's corporate heartland to work closer to home two years ago.

Doueihi has since been promoted to the head of strategy and innovation. She is focused on developing Endeavour Energy's corporate strategy for enabling the decarbonisation of the electricity grid and supporting renewable energy solutions for business and residential customers in the region.

“Better work opportunities are starting to unfold at the doorstep for people like me in Western Sydney,” Doueihy says.

She only travels about 20 minutes to get to the office each morning, which means more time with family each week.

Now that she’s not sitting in traffic for so long each day, she has the time to train for half-marathon events, get along to a local book club and run around three children to their after-school activities. “It’s really important to get that flexibility and balance right if you want to achieve work/life balance, and I’ve found it.”

A new perspective

These stories are increasingly common in recruitment circles.

The founder of West Recruitment Sean Johnston was born and raised in the Western Sydney region and has watched it grow and evolve over the past two decades.

He agrees that a change of perspective since lockdowns has resulted in growing numbers of senior candidates opting to live and work in western Sydney [<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5aqty>] in a bid to enjoy life after knock off instead of sitting in traffic gridlock.

Johnston says western Sydney has always been an economic powerhouse, but even more so given the huge economic development being undertaken across the region.

“When I first started recruiting in the west over 20 years ago, most of the large corporate businesses and big accounting firms were based in the CBD. To secure a top salary and really progress your corporate career, you needed to work in the CBD or North Sydney, and later Macquarie Park,” Johnston recalls.

But these days, western Sydney has been transformed, with large estates now home to young families. The lifestyle improvements are vast, while

impressive new offices and business parks are being developed in Riverstone, Norwest Business Park, Parramatta CBD and Olympic Park to cater for the expanding workforce, Johnston says.

Senior talent looking for roles paying up to \$200,000 take location into account and want to work closer to home to have a better lifestyle, he says.



There has been major shift in how people feel about working in western Sydney, says Melissa Irwin, of Endeavour Energy.

“People want to work closer to home in western Sydney where opportunities exist to walk, run or ride your bike to work, and salaries are compatible with the city anyway,” he says.

“Opportunities to forge careers are plentiful, and because salaries are compatible with the CBD anyway, why would people want to battle the herds of commuters, or battle the increasing tolls that guard the Sydney CBD? No matter if you’re white or blue collar, the west is home to some of the best candidate talent around,” Johnston says.

War for talent

Norwest Recruitment interviews more than 100 candidates a week for roles in the western Sydney area, says Erica Westbury, the company’s managing director. “The economy might be struggling, but a huge demand for talent remains.”

Westbury says: “It’s been a candidate-driven market in the last 12 months. There’s not enough talent out there so people are calling the shots on salary and conditions and companies are worrying and trying to figure out about how to attract and retain their best people.”

“Paramatta is a very different place than when I set up 20 years ago, with more than 4000 public service roles in the area. There’s huge demand for good talent in this neck of the woods,” she says.

Chairman and CEO of employment firm Asuria, Con Kittos, describes western Sydney as one of the most vibrant job markets in the country. “The preference is for everyone to work closer to home than ever before and the opportunities to live and work in western Sydney are greater than they’ve ever been,” Kittos says.



Western Sydney is a vibrant market, says Con Kittos, of Asuria.

The candidate shortage is so severe that it's stifling corporate growth opportunities.

A skills gap exists across high-value sectors, including construction, advanced manufacturing, scientific and technical services, health care and tertiary education, Kittos says.

“There’s a high level of unmet demand in growth employment areas. Very desperate employers can’t get people responding to high-value and entry-level jobs,” he says.

But money talks, and corporate salaries have ballooned in the last year or two.

And while salaries have backed off a little, the war on talent results in substantial counter-offers being put on the table for key roles, Johnston says.

“One placement we did see the candidate literally double their salary and they were already on \$250,000,” he says.



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