

Flexible Work Schedule

Guidelines for Establishing a Program

By **Brian L. McDermott**

According to the Families and Work Institutes' 2002 *National Study of the Changing Workforce*, 55% of all employees surveyed reported they did not have enough time for themselves. It is no surprise, then, that more and more employees say they would like greater workplace flexibility to address work-life conflict. Employers who choose to adopt a more flexible approach to their staffing protocol, therefore, could experience a win-win situation.

According to the same study, 72% of employees with more access to a flexible work schedule reported a high likelihood of staying with their employer for the next year, compared with 49% of employees without such access. Similarly, 67% of those surveyed with access to a flexible work schedule reported a high level of job satisfaction, compared with 23% of employees without such access.

Higher levels of employee satisfaction and commitment positively impact a company's bottom line. Other benefits of flexible work schedules include improved workload management, greater success in attracting high-caliber recruits, enhanced employee diversity and increased employee retention rates.

For example, according to a 1998 Watson Wyatt survey involving 614 companies, half of the companies surveyed reported that flexibility was their most effective retention tool. In addition, flexibility may lead to lower health care costs as 33% of those employees with access to a flexible work schedule exhibited better mental health, compared with 17% without such access.

Flexible work schedules relate to when work gets done. They include flexibility in employee starting and quitting times (within a range of core-operating hours), work-from-home options and working a compressed workweek (e.g., four 10-hour days). To truly be a win-win option, scheduling options must fit the operational needs of the company, and may need to vary according to the roles, needs and

abilities of those employees choosing to take advantage of a flexible work schedule.

According to the Families and Work Institute, most companies follow a similar approach and consider the following steps when establishing flexible work schedule options:

Build upon what is already in place – Determine if any ad-hoc flexible work arrangements are already being used within your organization with success. Assess the experiences of any employees and supervisors who maintain such schedules.

Internal and External Research – Conduct internal research to consider what problems would be addressed by offering flexible work schedules, and research comparable companies to ascertain what has or has not worked for them. The results of this research should be used to develop a business case supporting flexible arrangements.



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Create a task force – Recruit a cross-section of supervisors and employees who can develop and then lead the roll-out of the new plan. Be sure to recruit those who are respected, can serve as role models and be champions of the endeavor.

Develop the plan – Decide what work options are best suited to your operation and draft the policies and practices for those options. It is important to consider how different options will be finalized, and how and when the practices will be reviewed once implemented.

Check with legal – Consult with legal counsel for a review of the plan before it is introduced to the employees. There are several legal issues to consider when creating flexible work schedules, including complying with collective bargaining agreements (if applicable), meeting overtime obligations under the FLSA and avoiding pay discrimination issues.

Roll out a pilot program – Introduce a small, short-test program to work out any glitches before fully implementing the plan on a broader scale.

Provide resources to facilitate implementation – Employees and supervisors may need examples of how to think and work through their options. Supervisors also may need assistance with learning new ways to manage around staffing changes. Integrate a “managing flexibility” seminar in the company's internal management training program. Make sure that supervisors experienced with managing flexible work schedules are available to assist those less familiar with this flexibility concept.

Promote – Communicate and promote the new opportunity to supervisors and employees.

Follow-up – Evaluate and set a schedule to review the effectiveness of the program for all concerned: supervisors, employees, work groups and the company as a whole.

Brag about success – Create a feedback program to gather success stories and highlight the successes in company newsletters and bulletin boards.

INFORMATION LINK

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