

# Flexible schedules

*Employees, workers benefit when it's done the right way*



**Sarah Sommers**

Yahoo and Best Buy made headlines when their chief executives decided to pull flexible work schedules or the opportunity to telecommute from their employees. There is much speculation about why they pulled the plug on these employee benefits, but many were guessing that both companies were avoiding a reduction in the workforce and this was one way to avoid it as many employees would simply not return to work without such flexibility. Those that did not or could not change from telecommuting to an in office position would be considered a voluntary resignation because they could not perform their work assignment.

According to the 2012 National Study of Employers conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management and the nonprofit Families and Work Institute, 77 percent of companies who were surveyed said that they now permit or encourage flextime, up from 66 percent from 2005. Nearly two-thirds reported that they allow employees to work occasionally from home, which is a significant increase from 34 percent prior to the recession seven years ago. Employees are also finding it more acceptable to turn down overtime hours. Now, 44 percent of employers surveyed said they give their workers a say in whether or when they will put in extra hours, which is an increase of 28 percent since 2005. (These figures are quoted from <http://www.laborlawyers.com/stretching-the-limits-on-flexible-work-arrangements>,

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“He who every morning plans the transaction of the day and follows out that plan, carries a thread that will guide him through the maze of the most busy life. But where no plan is laid, where the disposal of time is surrendered merely to the chance of incidence, chaos will soon reign.”

—Victor Hugo

on the Web site of Fischer & Phillips Attorneys At Law.)

Flexible work schedules are about striking the balance with your employees or creating that family/work life balance that so many of us hear about today. After all, we are a 24/7 global business economy. Good or bad, there are a few things to consider when offering a flexible work environment or schedule including a discussion about why it is important for a company to have a written policy outlining the opportunity to telecommute or to own a flexible work schedule.

There is value to both the employee and the employer with regard to a flexible work schedule. First, let's be clear about what a flexible work schedule might look like. It could take the face of working flexible daily hours, compressing work days (working four, 10 hour days vs. five, eight-hour days), telecommuting and in some cases, it may look different from week to week. Employees typically experience the following benefits:

- Flexibility to meet family needs, personal obligations, and life responsibilities
  - Reduced commuting time and fuel costs while avoiding traffic issues
  - Increased feeling of personal control over schedule and work environment
  - Reduced employee burnout due to overload; increased morale
  - Freedom to work when they accomplish most and enjoy working. (eg. morning person vs. night person)
  - Depending on the flexible work schedule chosen, a possible decrease external childcare hours and costs
- Employers generally experience the following benefits of flexible work schedules:
- Increased employee morale, engagement, and commitment to the organization
  - Improvement of quality of work
  - Reduced absenteeism and turnover
  - Additional resource for recruiting new employees
  - Allowance for people to work when

they accomplish most and enjoy working. (e.g. morning person vs. night person)

- Extended hours of operation for departments such as customer service

- Increased productivity

Sounds like a no-brainer, right? Why would a business ever stop doing this or not implement flexible schedules? Employer concerns are quite valid and should not be taken lightly. Many employers and supervisors feel like they lose control of their employees or feel that they are being taken advantage of by their employees. Is John Doe developing that presentation, or is he hitting golf balls at the driving range? This is why a company needs to implement a telecommuting policy to maintain the control, provide the opportunity (maybe the employee has to “earn” the opportunity) and then be able to redirect an employee when it is felt that the employee is taking advantage of the new schedule. Employers are encouraged to detail holiday schedules as well to avoid confusion. Simply set proper expectations in the policy and have measures to retract the opportunity from the employee if needed.

Provide consideration for an employee's classification (exempt or non-exempt) to avoid any pitfalls associated with applicable wage laws and how that employee is to be paid. Overtime could be a factor for employees classified as non-exempt and the return on this investment might not pay off financially for your company. Encourage proper record keeping measures to track hours worked, holidays etc. Just because the employee is working from a different site or different hours, doesn't exempt them from keeping records!

Finally, before you consider a flexible work schedule or offer telecommuting to some or all of your staff, be sure to review each position and employee as an appropriate candidate for a flexible schedule. Not every position nor every employee is a viable solution for a flexible schedule. Successful flexible work arrangements must include close and frequent communication between the staff member and the manager.

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