

Flexible Working Hours

How to navigate flexible working arrangements

Why flexible working hours work – in a nutshell

Flexible working hours recognise that work can be performed at times and places outside standard office hours.

- They allow employees to meet personal or family responsibilities and commitments that occur during work hours.
- They are a way for employers to demonstrate support for their staff, adding to organisational morale and lowering attrition rates.
- They can work in favour of clients' needs for more flexible service delivery, rather than a set-hours approach.

What the *Fair Work Act 2009* says

All employees who have completed at least 12 months' continuous service with their employer (including long-term casuals) may request a change in their working arrangements if they require flexibility because:

- they are a parent, or have responsibility for the care of a child of school age or younger; or
- other circumstances such as being a carer or having a disability.

The employer may refuse the request only on reasonable business grounds.

How to make it work

Flexible working hours can be arranged in many different ways such as:

- increasing the span of working hours each day, starting earlier and finishing later, to enable the employee to work a four-day week
- flexibility across an employee's lifetime such as early retirement programs and grandparent's leave
- accrual of working hours to be taken as leave at other times for personal or family matters – an 'hours bank'

- 48/52 – allowing the employee to take an additional annual four weeks' unpaid leave on an as-needed basis, by adjusting their salary to 48 weeks paid over 52 weeks.

Tips for employees requesting flexibility

- Review your role to understand how it may need to be redesigned to ensure your particular flexible arrangement meets the needs of your clients and employer.
- Understand your working style to make sure the arrangement plays to your strengths.
- Identify ways in which a flexible hours arrangement can benefit both your employer and you.
- Try to negotiate your working hours to suit the realistic needs of your clients.
- Find out how technology can help and use it to support your case – for example, using teleconferencing to participate in important meetings when you are away from the office.

Tips for employers

- Keep in mind that employees requesting flexible hours may only need to do so at certain times during their careers.
- Develop clear policies that include the organisation's position on flexible working hours and the decision-making criteria that will apply to requests.
- Provide organisation-wide support for flexible working hours so that, as a practice, it is accepted as part of workplace culture.
- Ensure flexible roles are redesigned where necessary to ensure clients' needs can continue to be properly met.
- Include flexible-working employees in training and professional development programs and ensure they have the same promotion opportunities as other employees.
- Schedule and plan meetings so that flexible-working employees are able to contribute or attend if practicable.
- Set some core times for flexible-working employees to be at work, and allow them to choose their starting and finishing times to suit life and family commitments.

Benefits of flexible working hours

- Employees who are encouraged to work flexibly are likely to remain loyal to their employers and motivated to make the arrangement work.
- Organisations with good flexible working arrangements are likely to retain employees for the long-haul, and therefore valuable organisational knowledge and mentors for up-coming employees.
- Promoting a culture of flexible work practices is a powerful recruitment strategy for attracting talented and skilled employees.
- Research shows a positive culture of work/life balance leads to improved organisational productivity and morale.
- It allows employees to meet obligations and pursue commitments outside of work, leading to well-rounded, happy, healthy and productive employees.

And some of the challenges . . .

- Flexibility is a two-way relationship. Both employers and employees need to have a flexible approach to the way work is performed.
- Sometimes managers can lack the will to encourage flexible working hours – it can all seem too hard. Often, all that is needed to overcome this, is an investment of time by managers and employees in education and training on making it work. Information is available to help in this regard, and the payoff in terms of staff retention and satisfaction is well worth the effort.
- Flexible arrangements can lead to managers expecting employees who work 'flexibly' to be available all or any hours. Flexible work arrangements should provide actual benefits for employees. Managers can ensure it works for them too but they need to make a conscious effort to provide realistic workloads.
- There can be an assumption that some clients and colleagues prefer dealing with employees who work standard hours. This can be addressed via management of client expectations, education of employees and clear communication and transparency about flexible arrangements. Clients work in the real world too, and are likely making similar arrangements with their own employees.