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Are You Leading a Responsive and Flexible Workforce?



Many of our people can work anytime, anywhere, and from a multitude of electronic devices. Our phone is more powerful and capable than desktop computers from just a few years ago.

This is the age of being a digital nomad, and increasingly, employees want to be part of the decision-making process that determines where they work, how they work, and when they work.

Some people work better in the morning, some work better at night, and others work best in the early afternoon. Great leaders are aware that their people want flexibility, and more employers are responding to the needs to their people so that they can attract, hire, and retain top talent. After salary and health care benefits, flexibility is the top request from employees.

Outdated work schedules often don't allow employees to adjust their work requirements around what works best for the employee, either to spend time with their kids in the morning, coach Little League in the afternoon, or volunteer with a school or community activity.

Supervisors of the past were often remiss in how they determined who was allowed flexibility, often making allowances for people with families, but not for those without dependents. This created resentment, and a sense that the leadership was unfair. If employers are going to provide a more flexible workforce, that have to make sure that these policies are applied fairly. Not every job lends itself to flexible working hours, but when possible, employers can make the job outcomes the requirement, and not time spent working.

Some leaders lament that they have to work with their employees regarding scheduling. This is confusing to current and future employees. If we are focused on results, not just people

sitting at a desk, then it shouldn't matter when, where, or for how long people work. If one employee can get a project finished in 4 hours while everyone else takes 12 hours, do you care where they are the rest of those hours?

While in the Navy, I had the good fortune to work with an amazing yeoman (an administrative specialist). We get up early in the Navy, but she was a *really* early morning person – she liked to start work at 4 AM. (I do not like working at 4 AM. I do not like being awake at 4 AM. I do not like even thinking about being awake at 4 AM.)

My Yeoman asked if we could move her working hours from the standard 7:30 AM – 5:00 PM to 4 AM-12 PM. This was unheard of 20 years ago. She didn't want a lunch break, or a breakfast break – she just wanted to come in to work at 4, work her full duty day, and be finished by noon.

She taught me how valuable this shift could be. This was a fantastic change. I normally left work at about 6 PM, and I left work on her desk. By the time I arrived at 7:30 the next morning, my files were complete, and the jobs that were assigned the afternoon before were already finished. We had morning meetings at 8 AM and thanks to her, I was always prepared. It was my first introduction to alternate work schedules, and because she made it clear when she was most productive, it worked beautifully.

In the civilian world, my first hire was a virtual assistant. Virtual assistants were not common ten years ago. Thanks to my Navy assistant, I had already been trained to focus on results, not time, so it was easy to transfer that experience of trust and value to Mika, who remains (fortunately for me!) an invaluable part of the team.

Increasingly, as leaders, we have to ensure that we provide the means for people to be successful. If employers today don't help their people manage their time, they will struggle to maintain a viable, motivated workforce.

As leaders, it is incumbent on us to provide our people with the tools they need to be as successful as possible, and that includes time.

We are currently in a tight job market. If your organization is losing valuable employees, providing more flexibility may help.

I'd love to hear what you think about this article. Please post your comment [here](#).

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