

Flexible working options - attract the workforce of the future.

By Kate Sykes and Emma Walsh

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Flexibility is fast becoming a catchcry in the Australian workforce. Just as customers demand choice, employees are demanding choice in relation to when and how they work. And their demands are being met as the national skills shortage starts to bite into small and big businesses. Employers are becoming more creative and competitive as they fight to attract and retain good people. The key weapon: flexible work arrangements. Research shows that it's not just the traditional students and working parents that are demanding workplace flexibility; generation Y through to Baby Boomers want more time in their busy life schedules to pursue other interests apart from work.

People require flexibility for a range of reasons. They may need to:

- Manage a healthy work/life balance;
- Spend more time with children or grandchildren;
- Pursue professional hobbies;
- Run small businesses alongside another career;
- Take a career break to travel explore their passions ;
- Pursue post graduates study and other tertiary courses;
- Prepare for, or transition into retirement;
- Meet carer/volunteering/personal responsibilities.

So if there is an obvious demand for flexibility, why do employers struggle to implement flexible work practices? Many organisations think that flexible work arrangements appear difficult or complex to organise and manage. But in fact all it takes is planning, consideration and a willingness to try something new – like introducing a new product or service to your organisation. Introducing flexible work doesn't have to be expensive - in fact it may save you in recruitment costs by not replacing people who might have otherwise left, not to mention the time saved and customer service levels maintained as a result. The following 4 steps will assist you in creating a more flexible workplace:

Step 1: Assess the demographics and needs of your employees in your team/organisation. Seek input from your employees to understand their differing needs; a one size fits all will have limited success. Staff discussions, surveys and exit interviews can help you determine if there are gaps in work practices.

Step 2: Research the job flexibility options available to you. Flexible work practices can take the form of part time, job share, tele/email commuting, part office/home/on the road arrangements, flexible start / finish times, flexible leave provisions such as career breaks and temporary working arrangements and phased return to work and retirement options.

Step 3: Agree a trial period to 'test drive' how the arrangement works in practice. Regularly consult with your employee and other co-workers so that issues can be discussed as they arise.

Step 4: Continually monitor the new arrangements and be flexible! The very nature of flexibility means you have to move with the ebbs and flows as life changes just as you have to with your customers changing needs.

Prominent companies, institutions and Government Agencies such as KPMG, Westpac, IBM, Origin Energy, St George Bank, and University of Sydney are all benefiting from flexible workplace policies. Common benefits these companies have experienced include:

- Higher staff retention, with a more energetic, committed, happy and focused workforce.
- More skilled and motivated staff, including mature age workers who are attracted to organisations with flexible working policies.
- The ability to attract staff that might have otherwise been unable to work.
- Savings on recruitment and retraining costs.
- Reduced absenteeism and stress as flexibility helps employees meet their outside commitments more easily.

To attract the workforce of the future, workplace flexibility is a critical ingredient. For more information on flexible work options and creating a flexible work practices policy, visit <http://www.jobwise.gov.au/Jobwise/Employers/default.htm>

Kate Sykes is the founder and director of www.careermums.com.au. Emma Walsh is the founder and director of www.mumsatwork.com.au

Appendix: Practical examples: Re-thinking workplace flexibility

Budget limitations but experience and expertise required

You have budget for another employee. The amount you have to spend equates to hiring someone in a junior position. Why not consider a skilled and experienced candidate on a part-time basis? Employ skill, expertise and life experience instead.

Adjust standard working hours to get the right person

Are you tied to standard working hours? Many businesses operate with its customers during the core hours of 10am – 3pm. Perhaps the other hours can be done from home? Flexible working hours can help the home front run more smoothly. And deliver to you more stress-free employees.

Position must be full-time but role can accommodate working from home arrangements for some of the week

Does your full-time role offer the ability to tele/email commute 1-2 days each week? Working from home can enhance productivity without the distraction of workplace banter and usual disruptions. And provide flexible working hours on these days for the career mum. A win-win.