Making Flexible Working Work

August 2014

Brief Overview
With the new legislation which came into effect on 30 June 2014, the number of requests for flexible working may start to increase. But how creative are you when negotiating hours of work, number of working days and location to ensure your business really benefits and your employees are happy too? Could it give you a competitive edge, increase retention or be the shape of things to come?

Working Flexibly?
Flexible working requests can come in all shapes and sizes. Working flexibly may mean working a ‘condensed week’ (full time hours over 4 days per week), working from home, a change of working pattern or reduced hours of work. The natural response may be that the job can’t be done outside of the contractual hours, but is this really the case?

Negotiation and Compromise
When you receive a flexible working request, be prepared to think about the benefits to the business before you think about the barriers. This may mean that whilst you may not be able to accommodate the request in its entirety, you may be able to come up with a workable solution that partially meets the request and has less of an impact on the business. If it is not acceptable to the employee, then you’ve at least shown that you were willing to consider their needs and have thought about it properly without just dismissing it as unworkable.

Forget about Presenteeism
It is fair to say that many of us have differing ideas about work life balance. What works for one person or Company may not work for another, and in a culture of 24/7 connectivity, it may be easy to expect employees to be responsive to emails and demands outside core hours. But do you really need them to be physically sat at work for them to do their job and is there a business need to restrict work to a certain time and location? Creating shifts and flexibility might enhance your business and give customers greater access to your services beyond the traditional hours of 9-5pm. Likewise, you may find an increase in productivity and engagement if your employee’s needs are being supported where the business is genuinely able to do so. If you can easily measure productivity and the quality of work produced, what’s the worst that can happen?

Trial the request
If you are genuinely unsure if it can work or not, why not trial a request over a fixed period of time? This could be anything from 4 weeks to 12 weeks in order to truly give the request a chance to work as well as an opportunity to evidence how the changes impact operationally on the business.

Make sure that you monitor the results; encourage regular discussion in order to obtain feedback regularly from colleagues and clients to monitor their engagement and performance. You should be prepared to fine tune the arrangements to ensure that it is working for both you and the employee before it is agreed as a formal and permanent change to their employment contract.

Managers’ Responsibilities
As a Manager, you have a responsibility to ensure that decisions are objective and made on a case by case basis - It’s not a case of determining whether someone is ‘sufficiently deserving’, it is a question of whether the business case can support the request and what benefits it can bring to both employee and employer. Managers also need to be able to make the decision to refuse a request even if others have been agreed – you may be able to support 3 people working 4 days weeks but not a fourth and fairly decline the request provided that it is objectively justified. Your business case for accepting or declining requests is key – proving it’s business and not discriminatory or for personal reasons.

HR Insight Viewpoint
By viewing a flexible working request in terms of how it could benefit the business as much as the employee, there may be fewer reasons why flexible working cannot work in your favour. Could this help you to attract and retain staff giving you a competitive edge or will you be left behind? For more information on this and other news and updates, please visit our website www.hrinsight.co.uk

FREE SEMINAR
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CAN WE HELP?
Please contact us if you would like more information about flexible working requests you receive from your team on 01708 758958 or visit our website at www.hrinsight.co.uk

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