

HR Connection

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Flexible Work Arrangements: An Essential HR Consideration

“Does your company offer flexible work hours?”

Have you been asked this question by a candidate or by an employee? This type of question is bound to surface, especially since work-life balance is a top priority for the new generation. If you don't know how you would answer the question, now is your chance to start preparing your response.

What are flexible work arrangements? Here are some of the most common ones:

- **Flex-Time:** Flexibility in starting and ending times.
- **Part-Time:** Cutting back both workload and hours.
- **Reduced schedule during non-busy season:** Increased working hours during your company's busy season and reduced working hours at other times in the year.
- **Job sharing:** Two part-time positions share the responsibilities of one full-time position.
- **Compressed work-week:** regular work week in fewer days, for example, 40 hours in 4 days.
- **Telecommuting:** working from a location other than the normal workplace, most often refers to working from home.

There is a growing demand for flexibility and it is best to decide in advance how to deal with these requests. While they are often treated on a case-by-case basis, without a clear policy, feelings of favouritism and injustice can be created.

Here are 5 must-haves that should encompass any flexible work arrangement policy:



In the latter part of 2010, 50% of employers were offering part-time options, 44% were offering flex-time and 12% were offering telecommuting.

- Source : Statistics Canada, November 15, 2010

1. **Eligibility criteria:** Who can request a work arrangement (limited to certain positions, minimum performance standards, etc.) and which arrangements are possible? For example, the receptionist cannot start past 8:30 a.m. so flex-time would not be considered a valid option.
2. **Approval process:** Who will review the employee's request and what is being analyzed? For example, considerations could include the ease of reassigning certain job tasks, how client service will be affected and the employee's past job performance.

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- 3. Compensation and benefits:** How will the employee's salary and benefits change? For example, when working part-time is their salary prorated? Will they still be eligible for group insurance and other benefits?
- 4. Communication and flexibility:** What is expected from an employee who has a flexible work arrangement? For example, when telecommuting, will the employee be required to attend meetings or training sessions in the office? How will their work be monitored?
- 5. Review process:** How will the success of the work arrangement be assessed? For example, will the work arrangement be terminated if there is a decline in the level of performance or if clients find that service is suffering?

Although there are multiple variables and elements to study carefully before offering flexible work arrangements, it is usually feasible. At times, there may be additional costs incurred, for instance the need to upgrade IT equipment for telecommuters. Nevertheless, the benefits, such as increased productivity, greater ability to recruit, reduced turnover and absenteeism will outweigh the costs in the long run. Keep in mind that you will always have the right if needed to eliminate these arrangements, unless stipulated differently in an employment contract.

Phased retirement by means of offering a flexible work arrangement is also growing in popularity!

“A Sun Life Financial survey conducted by Ipsos Reid released earlier this year found that 59% of Canadians age 57 to 65 were expecting to gear down to part-time, freelance or other reduced-hour arrangements prior to full retirement.”

- Source : Canadian Business, November 21, 2012

While it is greatly advisable to take the time to ensure that your business continues to operate successfully, it is equally important to ensure that your employees are pleased with their work schedules. Flexibility is not only a talent attraction tool but will also engage and retain your most important asset, your employees.

Now you can confidently respond to the next person who asks: “How flexible is your company?”

“At companies of all sizes recognized on the 2013 list of Canada’s Top 100 Employers, telecommuting and other flexible work options are the norm.”

- Source : thestar.com, by Sheryl Smolkin At Work, published on March 17, 2013

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■ ■ Ask an HR Expert

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There is a conflict brewing between two employees in my department. They are currently not speaking to each other which is causing tension and disrupting the work flow of my team. We are a small office and everyone needs to get along. Do you have any advice on how to resolve this? ”

Conflicts in the workplace are a very serious issue that must be acted upon quickly. Unchecked, they can harm the work environment, can lead to staff burnout or depression and can even result in a psychological harassment complaint against the employer.

As this conflict has been going on for a while, we will assume that the employees are incapable of working it out themselves, and therefore it is time for a third person or mediator to get involved. While this type of conflict is complex and solutions will vary depending on the cause, here are some basic steps you can take to help manage, mediate, and hopefully resolve the situation:

1. Meet each employee separately to discuss the conflict and to let them express their side of the story. Depending on the cause and/or the seriousness of the conflict, it is generally not recommended to meet the employees together at this stage; it could do more harm than good.
2. Try to be objective and do not let personal feelings for one employee interfere with your sound judgment. Try to see the problem from each of their perspectives.
3. If the issue is work-related (ex. lack of clarity with regards to responsibilities, performance issues), try to resolve the issue if you are in a position to do so or see someone who can remedy the problem.
4. Be clear as to what your expectations are as to their behavior (i.e. that they will act with professionalism, will ask and respond politely to each other's questions, will not speak negatively of one another to co-workers, etc.) and discuss how their conflict has been affecting each other and the workplace.
5. Re-familiarize yourself with the company's policy on psychological harassment and the steps to take, particularly should one of the parties wish to make an official complaint.
6. Refer them to your Employee Assistance Program, should one be available, where they can receive individual counseling to help resolve the conflict.
7. If you feel they are able to discuss their issues in a civil and respectful manner you can meet both individuals together so that they can discuss their issues in a safe environment. It could be useful to set ground rules prior to this meeting to ensure that it is productive and respectful of both parties. Reiterate your expectations as to their behavior so that they are clear that the expectations apply to both of them.
8. Follow-up on a timely basis, and take the necessary measures if one (or both) of the parties is still not respecting the expectations set forth.

If you do not feel that you will be able to properly handle the situation at any point, or if the conflict continues to escalate, do not hesitate to bring in a professional counselor or industrial psychologist who can coach you or who can act as an impartial mediator to the conflict.

In every HR Connection, one of our HR experts will answer a frequently asked question from our readers. If you have a question, please don't hesitate to email hr@flmontreal.com, and we may select it for our next issue!

Employee Recognition...pays!

As a Manager, you always look to attract a skilled workforce, and once found it you definitely need to retain it. Employees are an essential resource to achieve organizational objectives and success, and so employee recognition has become a fundamental practice to facilitate the mobilization of star performers.

Employee recognition increases motivation and consequently enhances employee engagement. Employees who feel recognized and appreciated for their work will be encouraged to develop their abilities in order to meet new professional goals. Moreover, by stimulating motivation, employees will align themselves with the organization's vision and consequently contribute more towards its success. Here are some examples of monetary and non-monetary recognition that you can apply in your business:

Monetary Recognition:

- Invitation to lunch
- Gift from their favourite store
- Additional days off
- Gift package for a family outing or getaway
- Tickets to a movie, concert, sporting event, or other entertainment
- Registration to a course related to their field or not

Non-monetary Recognition:

- Verbal thank you or encouragement (in private or in public)
- Hand-written thank you note
- Assignment to a special project
- Recommendation on LinkedIn
- Involvement in certain business decisions
- Regular feedback on their performance

To manage a successful recognition practice in your business you need to institute it within the culture manifested by the entire management team. But be careful! Managers must try as much as possible to tailor the monetary and non-monetary rewards for the employee in question. For example, avoid giving a challenging special project to an employee who already has enough on their plate. By the same token, tickets to a sporting event would likely only interest sports fans.

Our hope is that with these tips you can already begin using employee recognition to obtain gratifying and enriching results for both your employees and organization!

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Please note that the information provided in this bulletin consists of general guidelines and that there are many exceptions and special cases that could apply.



Micheline Maillet, CHRP
Director, Human Resources

T (514) 908-4772
mmaillet@flmontreal.com



Juliana D'Orso, CHRP
Senior Advisor, Human Resources

T (514) 908-4781
jdorso@flmontreal.com



Elida Eid, CHRP
Coordinator, Human Resources

T (514) 875-2865, ext. 235
eeid@flmontreal.com



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www.LeadingEdgeAlliance.com