Flexible Work Tips for Supervisors

Be informed:

Considering new ways of managing employees and structuring work can be intimidating. It can also be uncomfortable for an employee to request a discussion with their supervisor on the topic of workplace flexibility. The resources available here are intended to help supervisors be well informed about the intricacies of flexible work and how to manage accordingly.

Consult:

Individual private consultations are available to supervisors on all issues pertaining to flexible work through Work/Life. Supervisors are encouraged to seek assistance when they are unsure of policies, process, and best practices. We welcome the opportunity to work with supervisors in a proactive and strengths-based manner, ideally before challenges occur.

Focus on results:

Supervisors who successfully manage employee performance through a results-oriented approach often find the transition to managing flexible work arrangements to be less dramatic than anticipated. Supervisors who are a part of a work culture that emphasizes presenteeism may be more challenged by this shift in management style.

Make a decision:

Supervisors need to make sure that the work of their unit is being accomplished in a timely manner and with solid results. Supervisors need to determine whether the work that is being done can be accomplished in just an as effective (or more effective) manner by utilization of a flexible schedule arrangement. They should take performance evaluations into consideration, as well as reliability and work styles.

Plan and communicate:

Consider the potential improvement of business/department needs when assessing flexible schedule proposals from employees. Develop systems and structures that allow employees to respond to ever-changing work demands, such as having a back-up plan for coverage and communication. Communicate consistently about standards for accountability, quality, and timeliness.

Include employees:

Make sure to include employees in the development and improvement of the department’s flexibility offerings. When arrangements are made, clearly communicate them with all employees, so that they fully understand their role and how their work lives will be impacted, as well as the flexible work options available.
Business requirements:

Decisions should be based completely on the employee's ability to achieve required business outcomes in the context of the team and ongoing business requirements. Decisions should not be made based on the life responsibilities for which the employee is requesting the arrangement.

Assess success:

Supervisors should consider redefining staffing success by job design and outcomes; hours, visibility (face-time), process, and location are not measures of success. Business outcomes, employee productivity and engagement are what make a difference in the work environment.

Create supportive environment:

Managers should find creative ways to promote an environment in which all employees feel supported to request flexibility.

Performance management tools:

Supervisors who have participated in performance management training may benefit from revisiting these tools and guidelines to ensure they are aware of changes to processes. Management of poor performance should be addressed in a timely, constructive and ongoing way, not as a newly-introduced reason to refuse a request for flexibility. Performance-related concerns should be addressed separately, if the cause of the problem is not related to the flexible workplace arrangement.

Eligibility:

When granting flexible work arrangements, focus on objective eligibility criteria (e.g., position, seniority, discipline history, performance record), rather than the reason for the request, to avoid unconscious decisions that may have legal implications.

(Adapted from the WFC Resources Newsbrief, July 2008)