



Making Flexible Working Work

In an ideal world, work is what you do, rather than a place you go. If you're working flexibly, or considering doing so, this Insider Guides provides some tips on ensuring you make it work as well as possible for you.

Looking for Win: win: win

Smart working can include working from different, and mobile, locations, working just part of the traditional working week, working 'full-time' hours but at times to suit you, working from home and, sometimes, having the scope to work in varying ways as long as you get the job done. It's all about finding a solution that scores for you, for those who work with you and for your employer.

It requires a mindset that focuses on delivery not presenteeism. The solution will not be one-size-fits-all and neither will it be once-for-all - it changes often across life stages.

You will need to be 'positively realistic'; there will be compromises as well as gains and any arrangement needs to take account of the culture and current working patterns within the organisation.



Business Case, not Special Case

Whether applying for flex or feeling the need to 'justify' an existing arrangement, remind yourself of the business case. That's a far more powerful starting point than approaching it as a special favour for certain groups such as parents. Flexible working works best when it is seen as simply an effective way of getting things done.

All the evidence suggests (see further resources):

- You're likely to be more engaged, productive, committed, loyal and well
- You will actually have MORE time to work (and be less stressed while working) if you're taking commute time out of the equation
- Quiet environment at home can mean you are more productive on certain projects
- Businesses that move over to a culture of flexibility as the norm report substantial savings in travel costs, real estate costs
- In a global, 24/7 always-on world, there is no such thing as 'full-time' so we need new ways of carving up work and the 'working day'.

When making the business case for any flexible working arrangements, use any guidance provided by your employer and also check out online resources to plan your application (under further resources).

Who can work flexibly?

Many organisations make flexibility an option for all, though it all depends on the nature of the work and role, and no-one has an absolute 'right'.

Parents of children under 17 (18 if the child is disabled) or Carers of adult dependents have a 'Right to request' meaning their application must be properly considered and there must be sound business reasons if it is turned down. Their application must be responded to according to a set process including appeals and written reasons for any refusal.

Grounds for refusing potentially include:

- Planned structural changes
- Burden of additional costs
- Inability to reorganise work among existing staff
- Inability to recruit additional staff
- Detrimental impact on quality
- Detrimental impact on performance
- Detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand
- Lack of work during the periods the employee proposes to work.

Doing Smarter, better: Designing your life - The practical approach

Get really clear about the immovable objects, the non-negotiables and how best to work around these (Working Families web guide is good on helping you itemise these).

- What can be flexed / negotiated: must-haves and nice-to-haves
- Your care commitments - days and times - What options do you have to manage these? You, your partner, your family, carer options, contingencies?
- Logistics who needs to be where and when? What are the likely pinch points and can you sit down together and review how they work?
- Your work, what time-and-place commitments do you have?
- Like Stephen R. Covey's (7 Habits of Highly Effective People) story of fitting rocks, pebbles, sand and water into a bowl, we need to put the rocks in first (the important large objects) before we fill it with sand...

Further on the practical side: Technology

Naturally we need appropriate workstation tools & connectivity, probably in multiple locations, & mobile; identify the best wifi hotspots for your usual routes.

Meetings - can these be set as dial-in as an alternative? Roundtable video-conferencing is helpful. At least explore handy ways of including photos of people to make it personal.

Explore technology available for personal organisation & productivity: e.g. Smartphone apps to create joint shopping / packing lists with a home partner; On-line shopping – saved regular lists & possibly mealplanning; cloud-based document storage.

Can you join or create networks & forums to share tips on technology solutions you use to smooth life outside work? Can you find a 'technology buddy' to get you set up and make best use of your gadgets if it's not your natural strength?

Stakeholder Management

Remember the importance of regular strategic, win-win communications with these 8 stakeholder communities.

- Manager
- Colleagues
- Clients
- Company culture in widest sense
- Domestic Partner (where relevant)
- Dependents (where relevant)
- Care providers (where relevant)
- Self!

We offer a few brief bullet points on each, for you to decide what works best for you.

Your Manager

- How are you managing your manager in terms of being pro-active? Treat your manager as your best customer
- Can priorities be clarified and negotiated? Focus on deliverables – where possible, propose that you manage yourself around agreed targets
- Can you ask your manager to agree team norms / checklists for how / when / whether to communicate with team members on days off etc?
- In any flexible working application, make sure you cover the contingencies? Identify how the impact on others can be managed, perhaps by some reciprocal flexibility
- Propose a trial of any individual flexible working arrangements – with agreed criteria, say on a 3month basis
- Is there any scope to use annual leave as a form of flexibility: taking holiday in small blocks
- Make sure your successes are seen (while also being a good team player and acknowledging others)
- Make a point of demonstrating how your work links to your manager's priorities – are you clear enough on that connection?
- "I'm the one that you want": Flexible workers sometimes worry they are not visible enough to be able to progress their careers. When you are seeking promotion, the classic advice is always: Act up – you can behave, dress, influence and comment strategically as if you were already at the level above your current one!
- Wherever possible, focus on solutions, rather than problems

Your Colleagues

- Agree Team norms for areas such as managing email / Blackberries
- Communicate availability with clarity and self-discipline

- Focus on results rather than presenteeism
- Flexibility, rather than rigidity, tends to be more popular, especially in senior roles. What can you flex around your own immovable needs?
- A whole team discussion of needs - recognise and allow those who are not parents or carers to specify some needs too.
- Against a culture of long hours, any shorter hours can feel hard to justify: clarify to colleagues if you have taken a pay cut to work less.
- Work out in advance the best response to challenging comments, then just do it.
- Where we are trying to trim workload to fit our hours, we need to let go of some meetings or processes: what are the absolute priorities for you? How will you communicate this?
- Where it seems difficult, get really clear on why – is it a practical need ... or a feeling?

Your clients

- Predictability and reliability are important: sometimes down to details such as an email signature that says how frequently email will be checked
- Agree preferred communication methods: some people are much happier with a phone call, others prefer the less obtrusive nature of email
- In any case, ensure your most valuable clients have a contact number (for an informed colleague if not for you), as well as email
- The best client service involves fitting their needs as far as possible, rather than your own style preferences. If necessary revisit and clarify what you can and can't promise, and have others prepared with enough knowledge to provide at least a holding response
- Remember that from time to time even the full-time, office-based worker needs to go to the loo, so a client may not necessarily expect 24/7 immediacy!
- In many sectors, your clients too will be on a journey to more flexible ways of working and may be keen to discuss how to make it work together.

Your Company's culture

- Observe: notice the culture & politics of your own organisation and choose which bits to copy. What gets rewarded and promoted? Can you do more of that within your flexible working arrangement?
- Fit your flexible working regime to the culture. How much explanation of how you propose to work and how much of a business case you make for flexible working will depend on how embedded flexibility is currently
- Make more conscious choices about how you describe your working pattern: do you block out bathtime each day as 'Meeting' or could you be a high profile role model for flexibility. Either may be a reasonable choice in different cultures
- Practical support: check out, use and tell others about any practical support available in your organisation that helps employees manage their lives, such as backup childcare, eldercare, where to find healthy eating options outside core hours, etc.

The importance of networking

Somewhere within our working patterns, we really need to make time for:

- Networking for profile and promotion: Flexible and remote workers can be less visible, less 'top of mind' for some senior influencers. Can you engage sponsors, champions or mentors to help you publicise successes and be seen?

- Networking for self-development: flexible workers may have less time to network with, and learn from, like-minded people. Can you identify just one network to commit to? Or join flexible social communities through online forums, webinars, wikis etc?
- Networking habits: can you make it a natural habit in your diary-planning to identify influential or supportive people you could / should be talking with each month and prioritise this along with other meetings?

Your Partner

- We need to manage, actively, the support we need from, and give to, others in our home lives.
- If you share family responsibilities with a partner at home, be aware of the assumptions you may both be making about whose job it is to arrange care, to manage the domestic chores and indeed whose salary the care fees are set against
- Voice your needs and also really listen when you are talking things through at home – brainstorm for both a quick fix and a lasting solution & avoid justifying / blaming
- Beware the passive-aggressive style: assuming partner will mind-read then being fumingly disappointed when they don't
- Don't just repeatedly try a failed method of getting more shared responsibility at home, but experiment with different approaches. For example, how would you describe how you currently divide the tasks between you and a partner: direct training & instruction, careful delegation, hands-off letting go, or an equal negotiation
- Praise what works more than you criticise what doesn't.

Your dependents

- Care solutions: Really spend the time and money to find ideal care solutions (in MFC Parents & Carers flex working survey 2011, 60% of those “very happy with work-life balance” say they have suitable care, 5% of those “very unhappy” say they do)
- Make contingency plans (in our survey over 45% cannot rely on immediate family members to help out) – Identify for example, a parent at your school you can trade pickups with, if the unexpected crops up, or a neighbour of your elderly relative who might pop in, in an emergency
- Form a team with those you care for: really talk and think together about things each persona can take responsibility for. For example, some children respond really well to being responsible for their own PE kit etc by reading their weekly needs from a family white board in the kitchen
- Make dates with your loved ones (e.g. a Saturday morning coffee with a teenage daughter): knowing you have these planned can take away some potential guilt about not being there all the time, too.

Yourself

- Time management - use tools and technology so they are liberating, not enslaving
- Strengths: Focus on strengths, promote yourself & avoid over-apologising. Know and be prepared to say out loud what you are good at: you may need to practise this with a friend!
- Positive psychology: We often focus on the limitations our caring roles impose rather than identifying what we contribute. Really notice the positives in what you are achieving in order to remain in a resourceful state (the failures are all too easy to spot!). And check out your self-talk: how much of the perceived culture is actually inside your head?
- Managing personal energy – take micro-exercise and micro-relaxation. You may need to be smart about exercising on the job, whether it's walking one tube stop further or exercising with your kids. You can't necessarily be everywhere you would like to be, so be selective.

- Thinking time: Regain some time to reflect and strategise: This time is often lost when working parttime, or around family. Use the 'moments in between': when you walk from one meeting to another, think big picture, relax your shoulders, breathe, (rather than fretting over that odd, slightly critical comment someone made in the last meeting)
- Impressive Dads – be aware that being involved with your family, alongside being ambitious at work, can be seen as character-enhancing in men. : It may still feel awkward to ask for time out for the school play or sports day but used wisely, a bit of role-modelling around prioritising family can be viewed as a leadership quality
- Take charge - Hint: use your parenting skills well at work and your professional, organisational skills at home! Be aware that parenting and caring will have enhanced some of your vital leadership skills such as prioritising, negotiating, multi-tasking, delegating, empathy. Make more of your transferable skills at work and use them to manage and team-build at home.
- Make a plan: You can sit down with a cup of tea (or glass of wine) and map out how well it's working for each of your stakeholders, the good, the not-so-good and the way forward. It helps to get clear and then act strategically.



Getting started

- Find a champion - ideally someone senior who also works flexibly and can help you progress.
- Experiments and data: set yourself a measurable goal (a big one such as promotion, or a small one such as getting home at a certain time next Thursday, or a general one such as switching off on your days off) work out what will get you closer to that goal - keep track of whether it happens
- We are the only ones who can take the lead on managing our own vision of work-life balance and what we want in terms of career achievement: Commit to an action in line with your vision this week.
- Are you in a position to use the Olympics / Paralympics as a trigger to rethink / trial things within your area?

Further information

To find out more information, please see the resources below.

Resource	Website	Contact
Gov.uk	www.gov.uk/flexible-working	N/A
Flexible Working	www.flexible-working.org/	Telephone: 01872 324991 Email: info@superfastcornwall.org
CEO of Me: Creating a Life That Works in the Flexible Job Age <i>Book by Ernst Kossek &, Brenda A. Lautsch</i>	www.amazon.co.uk/CEO-Me-Creating-Flexible-paperback/dp/0132480581	N/A

Recommended Service



Back-Up Care

We provide a trusted safety net when regular care plans are disrupted, for last-minute emergencies and upcoming gaps in care - but you still need to work.

Visit your **Client Landing Page** to book care today and access your wider benefits.