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## Maintaining Work-Life Balance Tool for People Retention

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A significant amount of an employee's waking hours are spent at work. Not long ago, for most people this meant showing up at their workplace for a defined time period each day and, depending on the organization, putting in additional hours or "face time" after regular hours or on weekends. Increasingly, employers are finding that helping workers create and maintain a balance between their home and work lives is key to retaining the best employees. Through alternative work and scheduling arrangements and other life and family friendly programs, employers that help employees reduce stress and gain personal satisfaction reap the benefits of a more loyal, motivated, and productive workforce. These programs can make your company more desirable to prospective employees and have even been shown to help decrease absenteeism among existing workers. There is no "one size fits all" approach to flexible scheduling. Whether a particular program will work for you depends largely on the specific needs and characteristics of your workforce. Before creating and implementing any plan, survey your employees to determine their needs so that you don't spin your wheels developing something that will not be seen as a benefit.

***Flextime.*** *Flextime* is a term for variable schedules that allow employees to vary the start and end times of their workdays while still working a standard number of hours within a given workweek. Employers designate a set of core hours during which all employees must be at the workplace, as well as the hours that are "flexible" for the employee. For example, you might designate the core hours as 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and permit your workers to start their day between 7:00 and 9:00 a.m. and leave between 4:00 and 6:00 p.m., depending on the time they start. Flextime is an attractive option to help employees deal with family issues, commuting patterns, and educational, volunteer, and wellness activities. Flextime programs can be structured on an ongoing basis or occasionally as needed by an individual. These programs are also attractive to employers because they can generate significant goodwill at virtually no cost to the organization.

***Telecommuting.*** Telecommuting, or telework, which allows employees to work from their homes or other locations outside of the office either occasionally or every day, is becoming a mainstay in American business. These arrangements help employers to attract and retain excellent workers

no matter where they live, help save on office overhead, and can boost productivity when employees spend less time commuting and suffering the frequent interruptions of an office setting.

**Job Sharing.** Job sharing allows two or more employees to share the responsibilities of one job. It is a way to attract and keep qualified individuals who, either because of conflicting priorities or lifestyle choices, do not desire to work full-time. Usually, the employees who wish to share a job will present a proposal to management that outlines the job coverage schedule and how responsibilities will be divided. Compensation is agreed between the company and the job sharers, but employees working less than full-time hours may receive reduced or part-time benefits.

**Compressed Workweek.** A compressed workweek allows full-time workers to complete the minimum weekly required hours in less than five full days. For example, to meet a required forty-hour workweek, employees might work four ten-hour days a week and get the fifth day off, or work eighty hours within a nine-day period and get the tenth day off. There are no specific legal requirements for structuring compressed workweeks, except that you must comply with any state or local overtime regulations applying to workdays of longer than eight hours.

While compressed workweeks are usually best suited to manufacturing businesses, hospitals, or positions where contact with customers is prearranged (e.g., doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc.), if this type of program fits in well with your business, there is no reason not to consider implementing it.

### Things to be considered

Not all positions are appropriate for alternative work arrangements. Some jobs require a physical presence in the office during normal working hours. A telecommuting arrangement will not be successful unless the individual has the discipline and focus to work independently and achieve

specified goals. When considering job-sharing arrangements, decide whether both employees are equally qualified to do the job and whether the nature of the position is such that it makes business sense to divide the work. You have the discretion to be selective about extending these benefits to workers, as long as you do not discriminate. If you deny individuals the flexibility they request, explaining your reasoning will help to diffuse resentment.

In addition, just because an employee works at home doesn't relieve you of the obligation to comply with minimum wage or overtime requirements, nor are you exempt from all

responsibilities to provide a safe workplace. Workers can and have filed workers compensation claims for injuries that occurred while telecommuting. Train workers on how to avoid foreseeable job-related injuries, such as repetitive motion or carpal tunnel disorders, and recognize that harassment and discrimination can still occur involving workers not present in the office.

### How to Implement

Once you have determined that your workers and your organization could benefit from alternative work arrangements, develop clear written plans or policies and communicate them to employees. While the plans will vary according to the details of the arrangement, you will want to include:

- A detailed description of the parameters of the program (e.g., the core and flexible hours included in a flextime program or acceptable work schedules for a compressed workweek, the types of positions suitable for the program, and other eligibility issues)
- Instructions for submitting employee requests under the plan or policy
- Criteria for managers to use in deciding whether to approve or reject requests, or for creating a new position specifically designed for a nontraditional work arrangement
- The consequences for misusing the program

- A statement that the organization has the right to change, suspend, or terminate the programs at any time and for any reason

### Summary

Upon approving an individual employee for participation in a flextime, telecommuting, or job-sharing program, it is helpful to draw up a written agreement signed by both the manager and employee with specific details of the situation. You can use this “contract” to evaluate the success of the arrangement or as documentation in the event of a future employee problem.

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