

Member's Quarterly

Summer 2018 Edition

Ask the Expert

Workplace Flexibility: Today's Most Coveted Value

Keep your employees productive and engaged

Question: What is the most coveted workplace value today?

Answer: Today's worker, from millennial to baby boomer, values workplace flexibility as a priority condition of labour.

Being able to stop work mid-day to run a personal errand, attend a child's kindergarten concert or drive a friend to the airport is considered even more important than the average number of hours worked in the week or the wage earned.

In fact, for the right to flexibility, as in also being able to opt to come in an hour earlier and leave an hour earlier, or work two extra hours a day and then be off for a day, most workers are willing to compromise other rewards or incentives.

The high value placed on flexibility evolved from two other trends: the demand for workers to put in longer work weeks and the insistence that through mobile technology, employees be accessible even while they are at home on their own time.

A growing number of workers put in a 45–47-hour work week. Most of them are still expected to respond to an urgent email or message sent to their home.

The result is inevitable: people feel burned out. They just don't have time to handle routine maintenance in their lives like going for a dental appointment, getting a prescribed medical test, getting a haircut or picking out a birthday gift for their loved one.

If a crisis strikes, like serious illness of a spouse, parent or child, the stress mounts. Many workers have no access at all to a paid leave to deal with such issues and an opportunity to return to their position when the crisis has passed.

The concept of more flexibility in the workplace prompts a growing number of workers to opt out of corporations and set up their own shops out of their homes or small rented spaces. The person works as many or even more hours, including weekends and holidays, but they feel less stressed because they can work within their own schedule. In this day and age, that is gold.

All of this discussion has led to a growing call for a more flexible workplace. Proponents believe the employees would be able to better balance their work and family obligations. Employers would have a predictable and stable workforce if they provided periods of paid leave to deal with family situations.

Many organizations are voluntarily responding. While more and more companies in Canada and the United States are offering more flexibility in work arrangements and expressing goodwill towards such a possibility, very few have actually formally included such arrangements into hiring contracts for the protection and clarification of their employees.

At this point, a great deal appears to depend on the goodwill of management towards the employee. While employees are grateful for that, it still leaves them in a deferential position and with uncertainty about what they can really expect in the future.

Having formal policies in place would also give HR departments methods of measuring the effectiveness of such policies in relation to employee engagement and retention.



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According to a WorldatWork 2015 report called "Trends in Workplace Flexibility," it is senior managers who are loathe to formalize workplace flexibility for fear that it will undermine the control and monitoring they feel they must do to manage their employees.

Paula Morand is a keynote speaker, author and leadership expert who helps high potential visionaries and organizations take their brand and their business to the next level. She can be reached via email at bookings@paulamorand.com.