

Why you should trust your employees to work more flexibly

Every single person at your company would benefit from the ability to work flexibly.

Memories of the pandemic may have forged a connection between remote work and stress, but when implemented thoughtfully, it can be leveraged to everyone's benefit.

The obvious benefits of flexible working are almost endless:

Health: employees can work remotely when they have a minor ailments, or if they're dealing with serious health complications

Family: spouses, parents, and caregivers can move their work hours to suit the needs of their family

Mental health: more control over work environment and schedule makes room to prioritise mental health needs and work-life balance

Productivity: individuals can choose the time and environment where they're most productive

Weather: extreme weather and dangerous road conditions can be avoided

Environmental impact: removing your commute every one day a week leads to a lower carbon footprint

Travel: the option to sometimes work remotely lets employees and management alike work remotely from desirable destinations

Many of these gains are familiar tricks of the flexible work trade; what lies beneath the surface are the subsequent company benefits. Flexible work options make your company more attractive to job seekers, plus employees will be less likely to leave and seek flexibility elsewhere. The benefits are too big to be ignored.

Not every role can be done remotely; but if it's *possible* for your company, then it's time to examine why you're not giving your employees flexible work arrangements.

When employers refuse to offer this, it leaves people to assume the worst: that management is out of touch with their employees' needs, not keeping up with the times, disorganised, or distrusting. It brings back memories of workplaces that refused to digitise their systems and called computers a 'trend.'

I know: allowing employees to work flexibly isn't something that you can make happen effortlessly. It may require money spent, new systems, and some discomfort. There will always be some natural friction when change takes place, and the larger your team is, the harder change becomes.

But it's also an opportunity to plan for the best. Use the end goal of flexible working as a catalyst for company improvement. When flexible working is done well, it generally says these 5 things about your company.

1. Good management. Every worker has probably experienced a manager who trusted no one and micromanaged everyone. Effective flexible teams are led by strong managers who trust their employees.
2. Effective systems. Employees sometimes working remotely are built on smooth systems that function automatically. Everyone knows what they need to do by when, and they have access to the resources to achieve their goals.
3. Resilience. Flexible work is synonymous with resilience. It gives companies the ability to prepare and react to difficult circumstances, such as global pandemics, extreme weather, office construction, etc.
4. Adaptability. Remote work fosters independent learning and troubleshooting, and individuals who work remotely are often well equipped to handle unexpected challenges.
5. Happier teammates. No one wants to use a day off work to wait for a repairman to come fix their refrigerator, or to stay home with a cold. The ability to sometimes work remotely creates room for life's inconveniences.

A job listing that offers flexible working opportunities says something huge to job candidates: this company trusts its employees and lets them leverage technology to make their jobs fit into their lives. So why are some companies still so resistant to this change?

Workplace change is always hard, and the conversation about trusting your employees to work flexibly touches on a difficult truth. Remote work isn't the source of your trust problems, it's just making you notice them more. A manager who only trusts their team to work when they're physically watching them is a manager who doesn't genuinely trust their team at all.

Flexible working might feel like a problem, but you can make it a solution. Use flexible working as the finish line and unify your team around the goal of making progress on your trust, efficiency, productivity, and job satisfaction.

The next time you're feeling sick, you have a mid-day doctor's appointment, or your car is getting repaired, you'll be glad that you did.

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