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5 TIPS TO GAIN MORE FLEXIBILITY AT WORK

Flexible Workplaces Becoming the Norm

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When looking for a job, you're likely focused on what type of position you'd like to land and probably not paying attention to hiring trends or hiring manager surveys. In fact, you may not even know that a relatively recent Flexpaths-LinkedIn Virtual Think Tanks study suggested "flexible" workplaces would become inevitable by 2015 because employers recognize their targeted employees expect some flexibility when it comes to their jobs.

Many Workers Will Sacrifice Money for Flexibility

Are you one of the 42 percent of working adults who would give up some of your salary in exchange for flexibility? What can you do to help move in the right direction if you'd like a less rigid work environment?

Allison O'Kelly, founder/CEO of Mom Corps, a national flexible staffing firm dedicated to connecting progressive employers with professionals seeking flexible work explains that there are two aspects to consider when determining the right path:

- 1) What flexible work scenario best fits your particular work environment and responsibilities, and
- 2) How do I approach my manager about work alternatives?

So in honor of National Telework Week (March 5-9), here are her five suggestions for attaining more flexibility at work.

1. Focus on Your Employer's Needs

Identify what your job and work environment will comfortably allow you to do. O'Kelly notes, "The Families and Work Institute defines workplace flexibility as enabling employees to exercise some measure of control over when, where and how much they work."

By their definition, workplace flexibility must be beneficial for the employee and the employer, rather than just one or the other. If you're planning to ask your boss for some flex time or to telecommute, be prepared to explain how the situation will benefit the workplace -- don't just focus on your own needs.

2. Know What You Hope to Gain

"There is no one-size-fits-all approach—that would assume everyone has the same life, the same familial responsibilities, the same work preferences, the same productivity schedules, etc.," O'Kelly says.

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She believes workers should be mindful about what exactly they hope to gain from the flexibility. Will it give you two extra hours with your kids by not having to commute? Are the cost savings significant, especially given rising fuel costs? Will a few hours a week of focused quiet time outside an active work environment allow you to be more productive?

3. Be Prepared

O'Kelly says, "Approaching the boss about work alternatives does not have to be a daunting proposition, nor does it mean you aren't committed to your job. The best approach is to come to the conversation well prepared. Check with your HR department before speaking with your manager to see if there is a flexible work plan in place -- some companies have one, but choose not publicize it. Also, explore if other employees within the organization are participating in alternative schedules and learn what has worked and what hasn't."

4. Anticipate Resistance

Present your manager with a plan that addresses reasons you anticipate he or she might rebuff your request.

"Include how you propose to interact with or manage team members from outside the office, how you can be reached at all times during work hours, how you have set up a dedicated at-home office environment, what schedule you think works best for the team dynamic, etc," O'Kelly suggests.

Keep in mind if you ask for a trial period, you will have a chance to prove flexible options can work. If you are successful and productive, it makes it difficult for your supervisor to turn down a permanent option.

5. The Studies Are on Your Side

O'Kelly explains, "Extensive studies have shown that having more flexibility or simply a modicum of control over their schedule makes employees more productive, more content, and better able to meet both personal and professional needs."

Despite this, many employees don't ask for flexibility because they are afraid it may reflect negatively or make them appear less committed to the job. Statistics available today show otherwise. Before moving ahead, educate yourself on the mutual benefits of flexible work options and be prepared to highlight benefits and past studies for your manager.

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