

## Coming and Going

### Flexible schedules can benefit all if handled correctly

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There is no law that says all employees must work a 9-to-5, 40-hour week. Face it – one schedule does not fit all, and if you feel most productive working a different schedule, it's a subject worth bringing up to your boss. These alternate schedules can benefit both the employee and the employer.

"Adults differ in which hours they are most productive," says Loren Ekroth, a speaker and corporate coach in Las Vegas. "Some are larks and others are owls. Allowing employees to be at the workplace during their most productive time can increase bottom-line results."

Ekroth adds that, by offering non-traditional schedules as a benefit, companies are able to retain top people who value this opportunity.

"Americans increasingly value free time from work over purely monetary considerations," she says. "Flexible schedules are a loyalty-increaser when a few bucks more are not. A few common alternate schedules are a four-day week with nine- to 10-hour days, or a 35-hour week with Friday afternoons off during the summer."

#### **Life changes**

Tracy Paden, an account supervisor for Cookerly Public Relations in Atlanta, was granted permission to switch to a four-day workweek following the birth to her daughter. Paden says the new schedule allowed her to achieve a work/life balance that wouldn't have been possible with a normal schedule.

"By the time I arrived home after commuting through Atlanta traffic, it is almost my daughter's bed time," she says. "Having a three-day weekend with her gives me a chance to balance out those days where I don't get to do much more than feed her, bathe her and put her to bed."

Paden adds that, on the professional side, the alternate schedule gives her ample time to complete her work and remain involved with her accounts at a strategic level.

"Knowing that I only have four days to accomplish my tasks, I am more focused on my work when I am in the office," she says.

#### **Decision time**

While an alternate schedule sounds great in theory for many people, whether it's actually a realistic option lies in the hands of the boss. Jennifer Selby Long, founder of the Selby Group in San Francisco, says before you ask your boss about this, put yourself in his or her

shoes.

"If you were the boss, you would have to have complete trust in your employee's commitment to getting the job done before you would agree to an alternative work schedule, right?" she says.

Selby says to ask yourself whether you've met all your deadlines, how you'll be available to your team when you aren't officially working, and what your plan is if anything goes wrong.

"Remember that if the alternative work schedule in any way damages the productivity of the team, it's your boss who will be on the line," says Selby. "Therefore, make yourself the type of employee a boss can trust. One who is visibly committed to success."

### **Help me help you**

When you're ready to ask for a flexible schedule, remember the old adage, "What's in it for me?"

"In other words, how will it benefit your boss by giving you flextime?" says Colleen Kettenhofen, a keynote speaker and workplace expert in Portland, Ore. "Be prepared ahead of time for what you're going to say. How will flexible hours help you be more productive? How would the quality of your work improve? For example, by working the dawn patrol and coming in at 7a.m., explain to your boss you'd accomplish more in less time because of fewer distractions."

Don't worry if your boss isn't receptive right away – there are ways to change their mind.

"Ask if you can test it out on a trial basis for 30 to 60 days," says Kettenhofen. "Often, bosses are more open to the idea if they don't have to live with decision. They want to see that your plan is guaranteed to work first."