

Flexible Scheduling

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Purpose: For many business professionals who also are parents or caregivers during their careers, the concept for flexible work schedules can become increasingly important as they balance their responsibilities at work and at home, taking care of children, aging parents and other family members. As a result of these added responsibilities, more Americans, particularly women, are finding it difficult to re-enter the workforce or remain full time. The scarcity of flexible work schedules eventually forces many women out of the workforce altogether, leaving untapped a large segment of qualified, ambitious professionals. To improve employee engagement and reduce turnover, companies across the U.S. have started implementing flexible scheduling practices within their organizations. This sought-after benefit offers improved work-life balance for employees, allowing them to face the demands of juggling work, family and life-related issues. Offering several possible flexible work arrangements can provide employees with increased flexibility with their work schedules while allowing a company to maintain a progressive and productive work environment. Employees are attracted to flexible schedules because they say the freedom will help them stay inspired and increase their productivity. For employers, allowing for flexible schedules within your company will assist in hiring and retaining top talent for your organization. Additionally, the benefits of offering flexible schedules include reduced tardiness, increased employee morale and engagement, higher retention rates and greater productivity.

Applies To: All managers, executives, and human resources personnel that oversee company policy.

Overview: A flexible work schedule is an alternative to the traditional 9 to 5, 40-hour workweek. It allows employees to vary their arrival and/or departure times to assist with greater work-life balance. Under standard policy, generally, an employee must work a predetermined number of hours per pay period and be present during a daily "core time" that is conducive to the business. Flexible scheduling may include reduced hours, teleworking and compressed workweeks. Flexible and compressed work schedules are offered when it is feasible and will not interfere with business needs and providing efficient and effective services.

Just 20 years ago, only 9 percent of U.S. workers worked from home on occasion. Today, that number has risen to 37 percent, and the number of people telecommuting full-time has grown 103 percent during the last 10 years, according to a Gallup Work and Education poll. According to the AARP, 61 percent of those who provide care for a family member older than 50 are also balancing employment, and half of today's workforce expects to provide care for aging family members in the next five years. Sixty-one percent of caregiver's report making work accommodations because of caregiving, with the most common adjustment being changes to one's work schedule: Arriving late, leaving early or taking time off during the day.

Various studies indicate both a growth in flexible work schedules and an expanded understanding of their relevance to workforce recruitment, morale, production and retention. However, to the extent that flexibility is available, access differs considerably across occupations. By creating more flexible work schedules, the growing workforce can balance family obligations with work responsibilities in a creative

and productive way. Topics and recommendations made below are to encourage conversation about this benefit to see whether it is a good fit for your organization.

Key Benefits: When it comes to flexible schedules, it is important to note the benefits are for employees as well as employers. From increased productivity to fewer missed days, and from significant cost savings to a more loyal workforce, employers benefit greatly from adopting flexible schedules in the workplace.

Increased Productivity	Better Health
Higher Performance	Increased Work-Life Balance
Open Talent Pool	Less Stress
Employment Engagement	Lower Turnover
Retaining Top Talent	Reduced Absenteeism
Competitive Benefits Package	Builds Trust
Reduced Tardiness	Saves Money

Guidance:

- 1. Flexible Work Schedule** – A flexible schedule is any regular, ongoing schedule that is outside the typical 9 to 5 workday. In a standard eight-hour workday, this schedule allows flexibility in an employee's starting and ending work times. Some employees, because of family or personal obligations or preferences, work very early in the morning and leave earlier in the afternoon. Other employees may prefer or need to start later in the day and work into the evening. Flexible scheduling is not a one-size-fits-all scenario. Establish baseline procedures to include core business hours of operation that employees should be in attendance. Evaluate if those core hours are helpful for your employees or if there's another flexible schedule that may work better (and produce better results) for both the company and employee. Ensure you record what your decisions and then review employee performance to make sure their work is successfully completed. If business dictates a meeting or call outside of core business hours, the employee will make every effort to participate. Employees may request to work a flexible schedule by submitting a completed Flexible Schedule Request Form to their supervisor for approval by a senior manager. The employee's direct supervisor should be confident that a flexible schedule arrangement will not negatively affect the quality of employee's work, their productivity or the ability of their department or the organization to meet its goals.
- 2. Teleworking** – Teleworking is an alternate work arrangement allowing an employee to work from a location other than their permanent office as part of their regular work schedule. Teleworking is a voluntary work alternative that is appropriate for some employees and some positions. This is not an entitlement; it is not a company-wide benefit and it in no way changes the employees' terms of employment. This differs from working remotely on occasion for inclement weather and emergency closures. Teleworking participation should be evaluated for the first 90 days to ensure compliance and productivity. After that time, permission can be continued or terminated. Teleworking should not be used as a replacement for childcare or elder care. It will be up to the employee's discretion to telework in those circumstances or request paid time off. Employees awarded the opportunity to telecommute must be responsive and available during their scheduled shift. It is recommended that all employees participating in teleworking are required to re-sign a telework agreement each year as part of their annual review process.
- 3. Remote Work** – Remote working is a temporary or permanent agreement between employee and manager to work from a non-office location for more than three consecutive days. Permanent remote work employees should indicate their primary residency in a remote work agreement. This agreement should outline the employee's responsibilities and any disclaimers made by the company. Availability

expectations should be outlined in a policy to ensure clear communication on start and end times. It is best to include remote working eligibility requirements in all job descriptions if this option is being offered. When offering remote work, it is important for your company to consider the following potential legalities and address accordingly:

- a. Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) Violations
 - i. Documentation of hours worked
 - ii. Overtime eligibility
 - b. Discrimination/Disability-Related Issues
 - i. Remote employees right to training, promotions and visibility
 - c. Work Environment Obligations
 - i. Remote office risk assessment
 - ii. Workers compensation eligibility
 - d. Data Security Concerns
 - i. How to handle confidential documents
 - ii. Potential breaches
 - e. Worksite Closure
 - i. Remote employees responding to office closures
4. **Compressed Workweek** – Compressed workweek schedules allow for a shorter workweek or two-week period depending on the company's policy and pay schedule. Compressed work schedules, for example, may consist of a 10-hour day, four-day workweek, in which an employee works 10 hours per workday, reducing the workweek to four days a week. Another option is working a nine-hour day four days per week with a half-day on Friday.

Example Compressed Schedules:

1. Eight (8) hours daily Monday through Friday one week, Nine (9) hours Monday through Thursday and work (4) four hours Friday.
2. Eight (8) hours daily Monday through Friday one week, Nine (10) hours Monday through Thursday and off all day Friday.

Compressed workweeks allow for employees to work 75 hours in nine days during a two-week payroll period, allowing for a flex day off. The flex day should be consistent in schedule and should require supervisor approval to ensure department coverage.

5. **Eligibility** – Determine if flexible scheduling is compatible with the company's overall goals and business plan. Companies should determine eligibility requirements to outline in their policy. This may include approval of supervisor, employee performance and employment time frame required before participation is allowed, such as 90 days of employment required. It should be specified to whom this policy applies if there is difference in corporate employees versus onsite employees, as well as positions and geographic location. Other eligibility requirements may include requiring that the employee have a satisfactory attendance record, meet all performance expectations in their current role and consistently demonstrate the ability to complete tasks and assignments on a timely basis. The organization reserves the right at any time to return employees' flexible schedule to their standard schedule if it does not permit the department to effectively operate or if changes in circumstances necessitate the return to standard schedule. It is recommended that job descriptions are written to include eligibility for flexible scheduling prior to hiring for any position.
6. **Company Policy** – It is recommended that any agreement of flexible scheduling is in writing (employee handbook) and signed by all parties. This policy should include whether there is a difference between corporate employees versus onsite employees, difference in positions or regional locations. Employees should submit a flexible schedule request form with approval from their

supervisor. The supervisor should be confident that a flexible schedule arrangement will not negatively affect the employee's quality of work, productivity or the ability of the organization to meet its goals. The form needs to have as much detail as possible to set clear expectations. By taking this step, you'll be able to refer should any issues arise. It is recommended to annually review and update this policy to ensure it remains accurate.

7. **Job Sharing** - Two part-time employees are assigned to the same job that is equivalent to one full-time employee. Job sharing, as an alternative work schedule, must ensure the continuity of the work being conducted at the same workstation, with two individuals working as a team to accomplish one full-time position's duties. A sample workweek might involve Teammate A working Monday to Wednesday and Teammate B working Wednesday to Friday at the same position, with some handoff and complementary responsibilities on the overlap day. In addition, the U.S. federal government has promoted job sharing as an opportunity within its departments to offer flexible employment to those who need more alternatives in taking care of their families, pursuing education or for those who have other reasons for desiring part-time work. Several state legislatures are reviewing bills that will require more flexible options for employees.
8. **On-Site Employees** – Flexible schedules are an effective means of managing personnel costs, in particular overtime costs, which is a win-win for employees and the business. Flexibility is cost and resource neutral when planned for and personnel costs of unscheduled absences are avoided. By building flexibility into the staffing models, some companies reduce overtime costs and offer more control and choice to employees during their working hours.

Because of the nature of the rental housing industry, onsite personnel may be required to work days, evenings, weekends or a combination of these depending on the individual's position. It is standard that most offices are open five to seven days per week, depending on location, property size and type of housing. It's important that someone is available onsite during standard operating hours to assist residents and prospects. While some of the flexible scheduling options above may not be an option due to the number of onsite employees, there may be a combination of flexibility that will allow use of this benefit. For example, if a leasing consultant is working 16 hours over the weekend, allow them to decide which two days they want off during the same payroll period. This allows the employee more control and they can schedule accordingly based on their availability. Another example would be rotating a compressed workweek among the site employees so that everyone has a flex day different than the others that allow for property coverage during slower times. There also is the option of floating positions that rotate to multiple properties and assist with coverage. A third example would be setting a rotation for employees that ramp up to standard business hours. If employee A arrives at 8 a.m. and leaves at 5 p.m., employee B arrives at 8:30 a.m. and leaves at 5:30 p.m. and employee C arrives at 9 a.m. and leaves at 6 p.m.

9. **Financial Impact** – The number of employees working at home has grown exponentially in the last two years. The 2017 "State of Telecommuting in the U.S. Employee Workforce" reports that 3.9 million employees are now working from home. With the effective use of flexible scheduling, employers are able to attract and retain top-notch professionals, resulting in reduced turnover and training costs. Having to replace employees comes at a price: 33 percent of a worker's annual salary on average. Implementing flexible schedule practices within your organization is cost-free to employers.
10. **Case Studies** – At time of publication, there were no public case stories within property management that showcase proven success of this strategy; however, there are many property management and supplier member companies that have implemented flexible schedules within their organizations. For

the purposes of this best practice, below are studies conducted in other industries to illustrate cost-effective value with flexible scheduling.

Case Study #1: Research by Nicholas Bloom, the William Eberle Professor of Economics at Stanford University, revealed that working remotely increases productivity, overall work hours and employee satisfaction. During a nine-month period, Bloom observed 250 employees at Ctrip, a Chinese travel website. Half of the employees worked from home and half worked in the office. As it turns out, removing the time it takes to physically commute to work and the distractions of the in-office environment made a huge difference: The telecommuters completed 13.5 percent more calls than the office workers, performed 10 percent more work overall, left the company at half the rate of people in the office, reported feeling more fulfilled at work and saved the company \$1,900 per employee.

Case Study #2: Marriott International, Inc., a worldwide hospitality company with more than 3,000 lodging properties, employs 152,000 people worldwide. Among U.S. workers, approximately 75 percent are categorized as hourly workers. With the use of technology and input from employee surveys, Marriott developed a program to allow flexibility in scheduling of employees. Using an internal web system, associates can sit at their desk and log-in to request time off, pick up overtime, pick up their daily schedule, trade shifts and use a flex coupon, subject to manager approval and coverage. Ten years ago, turnover was 150 percent; now it's down to 60 percent (87 percent industry standard) due largely to flexible work options.

11. **Pilot Implementation** - Before you implement a flexible workplace initiative for the entire organization, consider starting a pilot program for a select department or positions. Set a date such as six months or even a year to run the trial and review the data. A pilot program not only gives your organization time to gather the necessary information for your trial's success, but it's also there to help work out problems that will arise with newly implemented arrangements. Once you discover the roadblocks and challenges, you can make adjustments and roll out the program to the rest of the organization. At the end of the trial period, gather enough data to evaluate the success. Questions to consider:

1. How did the company benefit?
2. How did the employee benefit?
3. How can we improve the process moving forward?

Related Links and/or Forms

[Society for Human Resource Management \(SHRM\). Example alternate work schedule policy](#)

Sample Compressed Workweek Request Form

Sample Telework Agreement

Sample Remote Work Agreement

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About NAA

The National Apartment Association (NAA) serves as the leading voice and preeminent resource through advocacy, education and collaboration on behalf of the rental housing industry. As a federation of nearly 160 affiliates, NAA encompasses over 82,000 members representing more than 9.7 million apartment homes globally. NAA believes that rental housing is a valuable partner in every community that emphasizes integrity, accountability, collaboration, community responsibility, inclusivity and innovation. NAA thanks its strategic partners Maintenance Supply Headquarters and Yardi. To learn more, visit www.naahq.org.