

Five ways to create a more flexible work culture

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You've probably heard a lot about workplace flexibility in recent years. Whether your employees are asking for it or you've read about workplace trends, flexible workplaces seem to be on the rise. Consider that nearly 70 percent of Human Resources leaders offer flexibility to help attract and retain talent.¹

In the end, flexibility is about creating space for people to be fully human. If you treat everyone on your team as if they matter, they're likely to work harder and stay with you longer.

Flexible workplaces may include the ability to:

- Work outside regular business hours
- Schedule compressed work weeks (e. g. two or three 12 hours shifts, four 10 hour shifts, etc.)
- Work remotely, either while traveling, from an office in another city, state or country or even from home
- Get time off approved for important life events, vacations and holidays
- Work extra hours to make up for an absence or partial workday

You can always be more flexible

Granted, not every job and not every company can accommodate most or all of the above flexible work styles. But flexibility comes in all shapes and sizes. And every team can benefit from the simple decision to value flexibility in whatever form works for the work that needs to get done. Your attitude and expectations play a vital role in your team's perception of flexibility. Here are some ways you can help create a culture of flexibility:

1. Encourage time off. Do you ever feel annoyed or stressed when team members take time off? Be sure not to let it show. Subtle resistance to time off requests may send a signal to your team that you care more about the work than the people who get it done. It's ideal to send the exact opposite message. Encourage your team to use all their available paid time off. What's best for them in the long run is also best for the quality of their work.

2. Cover for each other. There will always be days when one or more of your team members can't take care of everything you'd like crossed off the list. There will even be days when they can't work at all. Set an example of pitching in and helping meet your customers' needs when you don't have all hands on deck. If you're consistent about it, this sends the positive message that you'll do the same for everyone on your team.

3. Support life goals. Is one of your team members going to school on nights or weekends? Or maybe someone has a baby on the way and you're worried about how to serve her clients through her maternity leave. Be sure to show your team their lives matter to you. Even if you don't yet know how, trust that you'll find a way to make everything go smoothly and encourage your team members' pursuits.

4. Always assume the best. Is someone late? Maybe he or she is helping someone else on the way to the office or meeting. Does a team member not want to take "no" for an answer about a specific time off request? He or she may have a good reason. It might be best to see if you can make an exception.

5. Encourage work/life balance. Work is an important part of life. But so is play. So are outside pursuits. And so is downtime. Try to align your team's culture with the ability to have a life beyond the workplace, too.

You might feel sometimes as if being flexible with your team gets in the way of the work. Be sure to keep in mind that it's good for your team's morale and long-term wellbeing to have some flexibility. It's really all about showing your team you value them as human beings.

¹ The 2015 Workplace Flexibility Study. Available at: www.workplacetrends.com. Accessed October 26, 2016.