



Building the Best Organizations in the Insurance Industry

HOW TO GET A FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE

By Francesca Di Meglio
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Men and women are feeling [the squeeze](#): on one end from child care, for which, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 15 percent of workers had access to employer assistance in 2008, and on the other end from elder care as demographics shift toward an aging population.

With these dual responsibilities in mind, some are looking to flexible work schedules to allow them to have it all -- time with family members and a competitive career.

For the most part, women are still shouldering much of these obligations. In a 2006 study of 1,755 working parents by Catalyst, a research and advisory organization for working women, nearly 80 percent of the women respondents reported having the main or total responsibility for child care in their households.

“Women are still the main caretakers of home and children,” says Karen Noble, former senior consultant and practice leader of the Everywhere Workplace at WFD Consulting in Waltham, Massachusetts, and now president of Karen Noble Consulting & Associates. Studies also suggest that women are more often responsible for elder care.

Given these realities, it’s not surprising that a 2001 Catalyst survey of people born between 1964 and 1975 found that women were more likely than men to report they’d like flexible work arrangements or that the later Catalyst study of working parents found that flexibility was among the top ways working parents felt employers could ease their stress.

If you’re among those -- man or woman -- who’d like a more flexible schedule, here’s how to rally coworkers and make a persuasive case to the boss.

Assess the Culture

Look around you. Does anyone else have a flexible arrangement? If so, talk to them. If not, find out if others are interested in such programs. Experts, including Noble, stress that work-life balance is not just a women’s issue.

Next, go to HR. Are flexible work schedules in the menu of benefits? Not knowing what you’re entitled to is a big mistake, says Karen Sumberg, assistant vice president of communications and projects at the Center for Work-Life Policy in New York. Many company programs go unused. If your company does not offer such a program, consider creating one.

Assess Yourself and Your Job

Flexible work arrangements come in different forms. They include a flexible start and end time, compressed or extended workweeks, and being able to leave the office during the day to tend to other commitments. Some HR consultants also label telecommuting (especially if it’s not everyday), job sharing and reduced work schedules as flexible arrangements.

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Given these variations, figure out what kind of schedule and arrangement work best with your work habits and job responsibilities. Would a particular schedule or arrangement improve or impair your ability to perform your job?

As you consider your options, be honest about your level of discipline and your past performance, suggests Diane Krieman, senior talent consultant at Hewitt Associates, an HR outsourcing and consulting firm. If you're not performing with a regular schedule, your boss is unlikely to hand you the privilege of a flexible one.

Put Yourself in Your Boss's Shoes

Position your proposed arrangement as one that benefits the employer through increased productivity or other cost savings. If, for example, a compressed workweek will provide added coverage at a time when the company needs it, sell your proposed schedule in that way.

"You need to position your request in a way that puts the interests of the business first," says Elizabeth Wilcox, author of [*The Mom Economy: The Mothers' Guide to Getting Family-Friendly Work*](#).

Prepare a Proposal

Write a formal business plan and schedule a meeting with your boss to explain the benefits to him and your employer. Be ready to explain how you will accomplish your job tasks. Outline why your flexible schedule won't make life more difficult for your boss or colleagues, says Jane Weizmann, senior consultant at Watson Wyatt, a consulting firm focused on human capital and financial management, in Arlington, Virginia.

Keep Your Promises

Once your flexible schedule gets approved, perform. Noble advises you go beyond your job objectives and set up metrics to measure your progress. She adds that keeping a timeline for achieving certain goals -- on the home front and in the office -- is a good way to determine if you're meeting your performance objectives. Check in with your boss often to ensure she's satisfied with your results. Set up a time to review the success of the proposed schedule a few months after it's in place. If it's not working, be open to change.

Communicate with Coworkers

Resentment from fellow coworkers is common. Performing well and communicating often is one way to gain support. "Resentment obstructs what needs to be done," says Weizmann. "People don't just walk around with your schedule in their heads." Tell colleagues and your boss where you are and what you're doing. Be up front with coworkers, says Noble, and have a back-up plan for modifying the system if necessary.

Set Boundaries

While you'll need to establish limits so you're not working overtime, be willing to make necessary accommodations. "You'll have to be flexible on your flexible schedule," says Wilcox. Flexibility from the employer demands the same in return.