

FLEXIBLE HOURS – CAN IT WORK?

I'm sure you have heard the same sort of horror stories I have about the Manager forced to resign as his employer refused him study leave? Another recent case involves the Manageress forced to resign because she was made to feel like she was 'letting the team down' by requesting flexible hours to breastfeed.

These incidents are more common than you'd think, with many local employers still viewing their human capital as totally dispensable and interchangeable.

In UK specific legislation has been enacted to cover this issue, and a recent test case ruled that it was sexual discrimination when a manageress was forced from her job because if she wanted to continue breastfeeding after maternity leave she would have to take unpaid leave. That aside, a recent survey in UK found that 90% of employers said they had no significant problems complying with new flexible working rights, which are aimed mostly at parents.

However, this issue can potentially be a minefield, so here with some suggestions on how it could work:

Firstly, although employers should become more aware of how work can be organized is changing; it is only fair to expect your request to be taken seriously only if you have completed 6 months employment there.

Before raising a request for flexible hours with an employer, you should be clear on how much time away are you actually asking for, and for how long do you envisage you will need the flexible hours.

It would appear more professional if you put your request in writing, explaining, the circumstances and ideal situation, and asking the supervisor concerned for a meeting to discuss your request. Remember, the final say will always rest with the employer, so to sweeten your chances you should be willing to provide solutions to them as well – such as a willingness to take work home, work Saturdays, train a colleague.

A 'best practice' scenario is that a final decision does not just rest with your line manager, but that they open up the discussion and decision to the rest of the team, so that you will not be 'resented' by others for time away, and may find they are willing to take up the slack.

You must be aware that this is a tricky subject because employers have every right to worry that your absence may imply extra costs, impact on productivity, performance or team cohesion, as well as maybe start a worrying trend. However, if you approach the situation professionally, not emotionally, as well as lay out 'make up' strategies, employers should have no excuse for an open attitude. After all, if an employer cannot accept that flexibility can enhance employee's loyalty and job engagement, then maybe it is time to look for a more understanding employer?

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