

Flexible Schedules, Working Remotely Can Empower Employees to Be Their Best

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We are so much more than just employees now. I am your secretary of AAPL, vice president of land for Infinity Natural Resources, an entrepreneur, treasurer of Michael Late Benedum Chapter Foundation and board member of MLBC; however, that only covers my professional world. I am also a wife, mom of three, sister, daughter, niece, aunt and best friend. This is a lot, but this is exactly how I want to live my life — to the absolute fullest. I love when my days are so full that it's a constant run and well-choreographed juggle. I wake up in motion and carry that momentum until crashing out at bedtime, but that is what happiness looks like to me.

I am not alone in this desire for a fulfilled, busy lifestyle. There are many other professionals who also strive to achieve personal, family or community aspirations while simultaneously thriving in their professional lives and achieving career goals. We live in a world where the roles of the parents are more blended than ever before. This is such a positive evolution; if society had maintained the more traditional, clearly defined roles, one of us would be missing out on some of life's most amazing memories in both our personal and professional worlds. Most families share the responsibilities of taking care of the family and household while balancing working full time. Every Sunday my husband and I plan out our week by color coordinating our calendars with work, children, community and household obligations. We try to plan everything in advance to help with the day-to-day flow of duties and to ensure we are organized. The biggest advantage we have in our lives — and the direct connection to our being able to chase our dreams — has been supportive and forward-thinking employers.

We are both fortunate to work for employers who support a flexible work schedule and offer the option of working remotely. Working remotely is not an opportunity to watch Netflix at home or get out of work assignments; it is a supportive tool companies can provide as a resource to their employees to help balance their personal and professional lives. Not only does a flexible work schedule afford the opportunity for my husband to coach my son's T-ball team and for me to be at my children's school programs, but it also allows my co-workers to care for aging parents, live a healthy lifestyle by exercising in the middle of the day or attend a course to help obtain a master's degree. The flexible work schedule helps employers to support their people as individuals with personal and professional demands — not just as employees of the company.

In 2008, I ran a title due diligence crew during the boom of the Marcellus Shale exploration in Appalachia and had a terrific landman who wanted to continue his work while he went back to school to finish his law degree. I didn't want to see him sacrifice his goals or inhibit his ambition, so we worked together to create a schedule that allowed him to attend classes during the day and work on his assignments in between classes and on the weekends. Because of the support he received, he was able to successfully balance his education ambitions while remaining the highest producing landman on the project for two years despite working unconventional hours.

Fast forward a few years to 2015 when I found myself in a situation where I needed my company's support and flexibility. My dad was battling a very aggressive cancer and I needed to be with him in North Carolina. My manager was understanding and knew that if she gave me the opportunity to

work remotely, I wouldn't miss a beat and we would continue to clear wells. I fulfilled my personal need to support my dad while following through with my commitment as land manager. When I returned to the office, I was more dedicated and more personally connected to my commitment to the company than ever before. In both scenarios, a flexible schedule resulted in employees who were more devoted and driven to support the companies and employers they felt support from.

As a manager, I build my team with people who are confident, loyal, capable and team oriented. I want to hire people who want the entire company to succeed and who understand and support the company's community and culture. When employees have more control over their schedule and work environment, they feel empowered. It can give them the opportunity to engage their entrepreneurial spirit and make them more productive and more confident in their success. When we treat our employees like people and care about their well-being and happiness, we create dependable, community-centered employees.

Through the advancements of technology, you can be in the room with anyone in the world at any time. There are levels of communication that can get lost through written words in emails or through phone conversations, but now with the advancements and clarity of video calls, you can accomplish the same connection with people as you would sitting in a conference room together. Infinity's main office is in Morgantown, West Virginia; however, we have partners in Dallas, Texas, and Greenwich, Connecticut, with whom we video chat daily. It provides a similar connection to being in the same space while allowing us to live and work in different geographic locations.

Working remotely can also help the company by reducing overhead and expenses. For example, when you allow your employees to work from home, it cuts down on the number of permanent workstations you need available in the office. I have seen companies that have been able to cut out their office expense completely or downsize significantly by allowing their employees to work from home or from other remote locations. This has allowed many companies to weather the storm we are all in right now.

Independent landmen have been managing their own schedules and working remotely since the beginning of exploration for oil and gas. As an independent landman, I had to be ready and able to negotiate a lease or a deal anywhere — from a board room with executives to a kitchen table with the entire family. I remember hauling around a printer in the trunk of my car to ensure I could print documents on the spot once the negotiations were finalized. As an independent landman, you are trusted to complete your responsibilities and your project within a certain time frame, but most of the time you set your own agenda and schedule. We should be providing that same trust and respect we enlist in our independent landmen to our company's employees.

Creating policies that address flexible work schedules is a smart way for companies to retain the needed mechanisms to hold people accountable for their responsibilities and to ensure productivity does not suffer due to environment or schedule changes. Clearly identifying expectations for utilizing flexible work schedules or working remotely will help ensure employees are successfully following the guidelines and parameters established by the company.

Zenefits, a human resource and payroll services firm, conducted a survey in 2018 of hundreds of small businesses to compile a benchmark report titled "The State of Flexible Work Arrangements." This report dives into small businesses offering flexible work benefits and provides insight into the advantages and disadvantages of these policies. The report concluded:

- 67% of small businesses offer some form of flexible work arrangements.

- 73% of employees said flexible work arrangements increased their satisfaction at work.
- 77% of employees consider flexible work arrangements as a major consideration when evaluating future job opportunities.

In addition to this report, numerous TED Talks and business journal articles explore the advantages of flexible work schedules and the ability to work remotely as a growing business trend that benefits both employees and employers. As technology continues to advance and the industry evolves to appeal to the next generation, leading companies that are open to new policies with more flexibility will help us to attract better talent and maintain superior employees.