

Getting In 2 HR - brainstorming in the bath - can it help businesses?

May 2008 - Issue 11

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The UK is starting to see the effects of an economic downturn. In this issue we will be looking at ways businesses may, from an HR perspective, be able to adjust their working ways and practices to help ride the possible 'storm' ahead.



Whether is it teleconferencing in the garden or writing a report from under the duvet, flexible working can come in many different guises. It is easy to see why employees have their reasons for wanting to encourage it with more time for hobbies, less time and cost commuting and reduced stress, but could flexible working really help businesses in the current climate?

In our second article we are highlighting the increased levels of fraud being seen within business and what companies should be doing to combat it.

Regards

Nicki

Flexible working today



Currently parents of children aged under six, and 18 if disabled, are entitled to ask their employers for flexible working options but it is rumoured that the

age limit could be

raised to 16 for all children.

Large companies are setting the tone; one already has 15% of its 90,000 UK workforce working from home full-time, more than 5% working part-time and they are now looking at jobs like call centres, where it has previously been thought to be too difficult to implement flexible working. SME's are also starting to embrace flexible working practices, with almost 75% saying they have introduced some form of flexible working.

Many people think flexible working has to be about big changes with everyone working from home, but that is not true. There are many possibilities for flexible working besides the home-working option including:-

- compressed hours
- nine-day fortnights
- flexible start and leave times
- term-time working
- part-time working
- job shares

So what is in it for employers?

Easier recruitment

A company offering flexible working is likely to attract high caliber candidates in an increasingly competitive labour market. Over the next few decades older people, carers and groups with special needs may form a significant part of the available labour market and flexible working will attract such employees. Businesses able to show that they value their employees will gain an enviable reputation as "Employers of Choice"



Better staff retention

Staff retention and attracting people back to work, particularly maternity returnees, can be a significant benefit given the costs of recruiting and training new employees - money that is wasted if they then move on. In the Mother@Work survey 54% put 'working away from the office' as the top benefit they want from a job, ranking it above receiving a pension (44%) or annual bonus (36%).

Improved business performance

A business with flexible working hours can meet customers' needs more readily as extended working hours can be organised to meet customer peaks and troughs. Employees will spend less time commuting and so will have more time available to deal with personal matters, such as dentist appointments or domestic repairs, without taking time off from work.

Increase employee productivity

Giving employees more control over their work-life balance often results in their being more productive during each working hour, work-related stress is reduced and job satisfaction is improved. One recent virtual call centre pilot, reported call handling increased by 20%, and "absenteeism" of home workers was reduced to 20% below the average. Home working can also reduce those time-wasting activities that inevitably arise within the office environment.

Reduced costs

Reducing the number of desks in the office and using them more effectively means smaller office spaces are required, perhaps removing or delaying the need to move to

larger premises if overcrowding is a problem. 'Hot-desking' can be organised for those employees normally working remotely and flexibly which will enable them to spend some time in the office.

Challenges

Inevitably there are challenges with trust that people are not working hard enough, being the major concern about those staff working from home. However, there are ways to deal with this and ensure the work is still being carried out properly by managing home-workers as though they were in the office. After all, how do you know that the people who are physically in the office are actually working hard? Most people do want to do a good job and so it is just a case of having the correct systems in place to ensure you are managing them properly.

The future

The legislation looks set to encourage more workers to balance their lives between home and work whilst encouraging more parents to return to work after starting their families. Now is the time for smaller businesses to take advantage of being less formal and offer flexible working where larger companies may not be able to.

Reducing fraud

British workers are costing businesses more than £1 billion a year on false expense claims, according to a recent survey.

Nearly half (43%) of respondents to the survey believed that falsified expense claims are a legitimate way of making extra cash. It is thought that the typical worker pockets an extra £17 a month through false claims, which equates to over £9,000 over a working lifetime.



In spite of this widespread fraud, only a small percentage of employees have been caught and disciplined, and 60% of managers have let employees get away with making false claims. Perhaps with tougher times ahead for businesses this is the time for employers to adopt a low-cost culture, starting by reviewing their expenses policy. However, this is a sensitive area as the 43% referred to above seem to regard falsifying expenses as acceptable rather than criminal behaviour.

I hope you have found this edition of **Getting In 2 HR** useful.

If you have a particular topic you would like to see included in a forthcoming issue then please send your topic and/or any questions to be answered to info@In2HR.co.uk

Disclaimer The information given in this newsletter is provided as a guide and overview only and not as specific legal facts. If you are unsure about any of the information provided you are advised to contact us directly.

Regards,

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