

The Ad Council's flexible work schedule policy

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Workplace Flexibility Case Study **The Ad Council's Flexible Work Schedule Policy**

Company: The Advertising Council (www.adcouncil.org)

Company profile: The Ad Council is a private, non-profit organization that produces, distributes, promotes and evaluates public service campaigns in an effort to effect social change and improve the lives of Americans. Its highly-successful campaigns began in 1942 with its original "Loose Lips Sink Ships" effort during World War II and have also included Smokey Bear's "Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires," "Take a Bite out of Crime" and "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste." With main offices in New York and Washington, D.C., the Ad Council employs approximately 100 people, 75 percent of whom are women. Across the organization, there are eight women who have children under age 12; six of those women have a flexible work arrangement while two work full-time. And of the six who have a flexible work schedule, four work from home one day a week while the other two work part-time. All of these workers have at least three years of experience with the Ad Council.

Program profile: The Ad Council has been offering its workers the opportunity to utilize a flexible work schedule for at least three years. The policy is open to all workers, provided they can show that their productivity won't decline, that there is no financial burden placed on the organization, and that all business operations remain covered during normal business hours. Employees wishing to work a flexible schedule are told to discuss their wishes with their immediate supervisor. The matter is then reviewed by the Ad Council's Human Resources department and a determination is made on whether the request can be accommodated. When appropriate, the Ad Council's flexible work schedule policy allows for workers to put in a reduced or part-time schedule; other employees arrange to work from home one day a week. If the needs of the organization and its clients are not being met because of an employee's flexible work schedule, the Ad Council has the option of terminating the arrangement. It has not needed to take such a step to date. It's worth noting that in one case, a worker's request to work from home one day a week was denied due to the obligations of her job. After a further review of the needs of the organization and the worker, the employee was able to switch to a part-time schedule.

The Challenge: The program began with a single employee who asked that she be allowed to work from home one day every week so that she could spend more time with her young child. For the Ad Council, the challenge was in attempting to keep a valued employee happy while still making sure the same level of work was maintained.

Benefits to employees: The Ad Council says the flexible work schedule benefit is designed to help keep its employees happy at home and happy at work because they are able to spend more time with their children while at the same time doing work that saves lives and makes a difference through social marketing. The organization also believes that it's a good thing for kids to get to spend more time with their mother; with a happier family, you get a happier worker.

Benefits to employer: For the Ad Council, this policy improves employee recruitment and retention as well as worker satisfaction – all positives for the employer. Potential new recruits (with or without children) see the agency as a worthwhile place to work that values its employees. Current employees who have young children are given the opportunity to continue their career in their current position, but with more flexibility to have work/life balance. In general, the organization believes its workers tend to be more loyal and dedicated to the Ad Council because of this kind of flexibility.

Lessons Learned: The Ad Council wants to be the kind of organization that "walks the talk." As a group that oversees many ad campaigns that are geared towards children, it wants to find flexible work options for all of its employees, including moms with young children. Most workers who fit into that category are taking advantage of some type of flexible work benefit. There has been no

downside (loss of productivity; loss of revenue; loss of clients) in offering flexible work options, and only a positive upside (keeping valued employees; helping to foster happy, well adjusted families; being viewed as socially responsible and pro-family).

Personal profile: Deborah Leiter is a vice president and campaign director for the Ad Council's New York City office. She has been with the agency for about six years and in her current job nearly two years. Deborah began a one-day-from-home schedule three months ago, after having spent three months on maternity leave following the birth of her first child. Deborah retains her regular babysitter on the days she works from home, which allows her to truly focus on her work. Says Deborah, "I think it's important that if your company is supportive enough to allow you to have this kind of flexibility, it's my responsibility to be really focused and do the same work that I would do from my office, at home. And I can." In fact, Deborah thinks she is a better worker from home. "In a way, I'm able to be a little more productive at home because I don't have as many interruptions as I would have at the office."

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