

MAKING FLEXIBLE WORKING WORK



How do you make flexible working work for your small business? Business Clan gave us their tips for successfully putting flexible working into practice.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING:

To a small business owner, a simple and effective opportunity to boost productivity, improve your reputation and increase revenue sounds appealing. And yet, although many companies will invest in marketing campaigns and put in the hard yards to generate PR, there are two words that strike fear into their very heart, despite carrying all these benefits. Flexible. Working.

It's understandable, really. Small businesses are far more exposed to risks than big corporations, and any step into the unknown can be daunting. But the fact is that flexible working can and does work. Not just for employees, but for the employer too - a recent survey by Vodafone highlighted that 83% of global companies offering flexible working improved their productivity. The traditional 9 to 5 drill isn't the standard anymore, and the case for it is dwindling. You just have to know how to make flexible working work in the context of your business.

Flexible working is at the cornerstone of how Business Clan works, and you won't find any stronger advocates for it, from an employer and employee perspective. But there is a third, often overlooked angle: the perspective of our clients. Many business owners worry about the impact of flexible working on client relationships. Ultimately, your client has one concern - the delivery of a quality service. If you manage flexible working effectively, there's nothing to worry about. They'll probably be impressed by seeing inclusivity in action!

FLEXIBLE WORKING: THE LAW

Every employee has the right to request flexible working (but can only make one request a year), and employers must reasonably consider all requests. Employees must make the request in writing, there has to be a meeting to discuss it and employers have to respond to the request within three months. You can refuse requests, but only on solid business reasons - they must fall into one of these categories:

- The burden of extra costs
- An inability to reorganise work among employees
- An inability to recruit additional employees
- A detrimental impact on quality
- A negative impact on performance
- An inability to meet customer demand
- Insufficient work for the period your employee proposes to work
- A planned structural change to the business

FLEXIBLE WORKING AS A SMALL BUSINESS

All the evidence suggests that - moral and legal obligations aside - employers stand to gain as much as their employees by supporting flexibility.

The big question for small employers is how to make it work, and for the answer, we've



to a small but growing business that's already done it. Business Clan is a team of women whose previous jobs didn't fit around their lives. They offer part-time, flexible work which allows everyone to balance everything from parenthood, voluntary work or sports for a healthy work/life balance. They won the 2018 Federation of Small Business National Award for Employer of the Year for their ethos of playing to everyone's strengths and collective expertise. Here's how they make it work:

1. Define flexibility clearly

To one person, it might mean working full-time, but from home. It might be job sharing or only working during term time. As an employer you need to be clear on what you can and can't support and understand what your employee needs to make the arrangement beneficial.

2. Clarify the purpose and goals

When you introduce flexible working, you need to make sure everyone understands how their work impacts your business. It's important to be clear about structure - who reports to who, and who's responsible for maintaining regular and relevant contact with remote workers.

3. Communicate!

Managing flexible working effectively means using the right systems for making communication work and making all employees aware of key messages no matter when, where or how they work. Equally though, it has to be timely. To be truly flexible, you can't expect your employees to be available for emails and calls outside their agreed hours.

4. Maintain a sense of 'team'

At Business Clan, everyone works entirely flexibly. There's an office, but there's no obligation to be there at any specific time. Yet, central to our success has been the sense of team we've created. We meet once a month as an entire company for training, strategy and planning, and we socialise regularly, from picnics to rounders matches with local businesses. The fact that we don't sit side by side, all day, every day doesn't make us less of a team. We made a conscious effort to make sure we frequently come together because 'no man (woman!) is an island'.

5. Share the wins

Showcasing your successes to the whole team is crucial to building camaraderie and creating a sense of pride and unity - but it can be easily forgotten. So, whether it's winning a new business pitch, receiving a glowing client testimonial or gaining a new accreditation, shout it from the rooftops so everyone (not just the people in the office at the time) gets to celebrate it!

