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ProAge How to guide – How Flexible working can help attract and retain older workers

Introduction

This ProAge ‘How to’ guide about Flexible Working offers insights and practical tips about how flexible working can help to retain and attract talent, especially those over 50.

Around half of men and women aged between 50 and 65 find their work too demanding and crave flexibility and self-determination over their working lives. This is one of the reasons why the over 50s represent the greatest proportion of the self-employed section of the working population across all age groups. The ability to choose when, where, how and how much they work, is a huge draw.

ProAge research and anecdotal insights suggest that the ability to work flexibly is a critical tool in attracting and retaining older workers.

So how can businesses retain older workers by adapting your flexible working approaches?

This is a job for everyone in a leadership position; Line and recruiting managers, business leaders and HR professionals should consider the following:

Tips for decision makers in organisations about flexible working

1. Include flexible working as part of a wider **progressive workforce planning policy** to attract and retain talent. Make it available to all employees where operational performance allows. This avoids the over 50's feeling that they are being singled out as a 'special case' or resentment that they are treated preferentially by other employees.
2. Flexible working needs to **tie in with your business strategy** – as well as employee preferences. It is a valuable strategic tool to attract and retain talent, useful when/where there are skills shortages, especially business critical ones.
3. There are many different types of flexible working including job share, term time only hours, compressed weeks, part time, flexi time and many more. **Engage your employees** in the process of working out which work for them and for the business.
4. Make sure your flexible working **policies are clear**, well understood, consistently applied and communicated with all staff.
5. Progressive flexible working policies are a useful **employee benefit** worth reminding staff that they receive and a differentiator vs. competitive organisations – particularly useful in a competitive recruitment environment.
6. As with all inclusion policies, **engagement by senior leadership** in demonstrating and living the values of flexible working will support its effectiveness in the workplace. Leverage this to hold open conversations between managers and staff at both a team and individual level.
7. **Create a safe environment:** Demonstrate that employees can talk about their need for flexible working safely and without fear of retribution. The desire for flexible working is common across different life stages and ages, it is just the reason (s) for it that vary.
8. Create a **shared sense of responsibility** in your organisation to commit to make flexible working work.
9. Consider a range of formal and informal arrangements within the spirit of the flexible working policy – but remember the need for fair and consistent application.
10. Ensure that you **address any staff concerns**, e.g. full time staff who may be concerned about the impact on their own workload.
11. For the over 50's, advice on how flexible working might **impact their pension or retirement options** is worth considering – specific targeted support, being mindful of the different personal financial situations of employees which they may not want to openly express/share with their

line manager. External professional expert advice may be a wise decision.

The importance of a line manager's direct relationship with staff cannot be overstated. They are responsible for creating and maintaining the safe environment to discuss flexible working, for ensuring that arrangements meet the needs of the individual as well as the organisation and for putting in place the formal and informal arrangements. Clear and measurable objectives of any flexible arrangement need to be set as well as fostering the shared sense of responsibility for getting it to work in reality.

Tips for individuals thinking about flexible working options

For staff thinking about flexible working here are some points to consider:

1. Think about what sort of flexibility would work for your role.
2. Think about your preferred working pattern.
3. Be prepared to detail how you would make it work for the business – the business benefits, and how it impacts on other members of your team or department.
4. Arrange to discuss it with your manager in a confidential setting.
5. Try it – ask for a trial period and arrange a meeting to review the trial period.
6. Recognise that flexible working needs to work for both the organisation and the individual.
7. Be prepared to compromise and try different things.
8. Be flexible as the team may change over time, so your flexible working needs to change/be renegotiated.

More

See the Centre for Ageing Better 'Flexible working for over 50s' – A toolkit for employers.

Check out the other ProAge How to guides.

Do share your successes. We'd like to share them with our network of ProAge Supporters too. E mail us using the Contact Us page.