



Welcome to the latest issue of the Swiftwork newsletter. In this issue we present our **five key ground rules** for making flexible working a success.

The legislation that has done most to promote the recent growth of flexible working, the Employment Act 2003, has generated tens of thousands of requests from parents to change their work patterns. But the Act's emphasis on the individual right of request for flexibility inevitably pushes employers towards a piecemeal reactive approach, trying to cope with each request for non-standard work patterns with no payback beyond boosting individual loyalty and morale when requests can be granted.

Too much HR and line management time can get tied up in trying to accommodate a few people's wishes to move away from the nine-to-five without the business suffering or colleagues' workloads increasing.

Swiftwork's experience of supporting more than 50 businesses, local authorities and government bodies in setting up successful flexible working programmes shows that employers who make a virtue of necessity and offer flexibility to whole teams and departments not only meet their statutory obligations, but also reap important business benefits. These include:

- Lower maintenance, as employees take responsibility for managing their own work patterns and output, saving managers' time.
- Improved goodwill and retention, as employees beyond the relatively narrow category of parents with children under five can access work patterns that suit their circumstances.
- Increased productivity, which usually comes with the sense of empowerment as employees and teams take responsibility for their outputs and service levels.

But the schemes that realise these gains share a few critical features which Swiftwork's experience shows are the glue of successful flexible working. We have distilled these features into five golden rules for flexibility.

### **Swiftwork's five golden rules**

**1. Respect the right to choose** - Changes in employment options must be voluntary. Flexible working, whether it is variable working hours or homeworking should be an opt-in process, intended to help all employees improve their work-life balance. If people are coerced into workstyles that do not suit them in the name of flexibility they will become resentful and less productive.

**2. Offer no guarantees** - A change of working pattern is not a right but a benefit and should only be agreed if it does not impact adversely on service levels or on other employees. Everyone should be aware that no arrangement is set in stone and service needs come first, so if these change, work patterns may have to change too.

**3. Share out responsibility** - Individuals, managers and teams have a joint responsibility for making flexibility succeed for themselves, each other and the business. Team-based flexibility places the emphasis on employees working together to produce win-win solutions for themselves and the organisation.



**4. Don't play God** - If flexibility is offered on the basis of employees making a sound case that their preferred work pattern has a neutral or beneficial impact on the organisation, then there is no need to prioritise 'deserving' cases. Managers do not need to know whether someone wants to work flexibly to help with dependent care or from simple preference, as long as the request meets the impact criteria.

**5. Trial reduces error** - Every scheme needs a pilot period to check that the changes do not create any unexpected problems for productivity or service delivery and that they deliver any predicted benefits. An experimental phase allows employees and the organisation to find what works for them and what doesn't before flexibility is formalised. This applies even to a team that has been working flexibly for a while. If someone new joins the team, or an existing employee wishes to change their working patterns, the new arrangements should be subject to a trial period.

Following these guidelines has allowed employers to use flexibility to leverage lasting improvements in service delivery, absence, retention and employee morale. We are happy to supply detailed metrics and case studies for private and public sector organisations on request.

Swiftwork can provide four alternative support or training options:

1. One-day workshops for managers in groups of 8 to 16 plus a one-day training workshop/seminar for employees in groups of up to 30
2. Piloted programme for managers and teams
3. Two-day training programme for in-house trainers
4. Online training courses for managers and homeworkers (see [http://www.swiftwork.com/online\\_training.asp](http://www.swiftwork.com/online_training.asp) for a demo)

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