

HOME team

When we discuss work/life balance and great places to work, we often hear the term family-friendly. What does it mean and how can you have a workplace that's friendly to the home team? Read on.

First, we must define what we mean when we talk about family. The family of today may be vastly different from the family of yesteryear. When we speak of family, some might picture young children and a mom and dad. Others might see a young newlywed couple or a Gen-Xer and his dog. Family can take many variations. It may be a single father and two children. It may be a man or woman and a significant other. It may be a single female caring for an aging parent.

A few statistics about employees and aging parents:

- This is the first time in history that American couples have had more parents than children.
- Today, the average American woman can expect to spend 18 years caring for an older family member, compared to 17 for her children.
- Almost 40% of all US workers are more involved in caring for a parent than they are for a child.
- By 2020, 53 million Americans will be 65 and older.

Being a family-friendly employer can mean many things. When you consider the many different types of families there are, it is clear that one strategy won't meet the needs of all families. Employers must consider the many different types of families and be open-minded when it comes to providing family-friendly workplace options.

PREDICTIONS

Many human resources consultants say we will see a radical shift in the way work is viewed after the baby boomers retire. In January 1998, Workforce magazine published an article written by author, researcher and teacher Floyd Kemske on his predictions for 2008. Here are some of his insights into the workforce of the future.

- There will be more of a "work to live" than a "live to work" mentality.
- Employees will demand increases in workplace flexibility to pursue life interests.
- More people will opt out of traditional careers
- Families will return to the center of society.

CONSEQUENCES

Some employers fear the consequences of being family-friendly. When an employee requests different work hours or time off to care for a relative, they fear being flexible will have an adverse impact on the workplace. Consider these questions. Are there any real costs to granting their request? Will the employee take advantage of you? Will you set a precedent? It is more likely that your employees will applaud your open-mindedness and willingness to help an employee in need. If you set clear expectations for your employees and hold them accountable for their results, you can afford to be family-friendly when it really matters.

One key piece to making it all work: manager buy-in. The family-friendly benefits may be available to your employees, but if you, as a supervisor, aren't on board, your employees will begin to look elsewhere.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY manager

You may feel restricted by your agency in terms of family-friendly programs or policies. Yet, even within the restrictions of the organization, there is much you can do to be family-friendly within your own group or team. Think about how you affect your employees and their families and what you can do to make it easier on them. Consider these questions:

- Do you expect your employees to work or travel on the weekends?
- Do you expect your employees to leave their personal lives at the door when they come to work?
- Do you allow them compensatory time when they have to work late?
- Do you permit them to take their families when they have to travel extensively?

ONE for the home team

Consider the following things you as a manager can do for your employees and their Home Team. Pick the ones that seem appropriate for your employees.

- Plan a family time, either a few designated hours or a day when employees may bring their children to the office.
- Have a family picnic.
- Attend funerals or other activities for family members.
- Don't forget the pets! For many people, pets are like children. Keep that in mind when your employees need time off. Have a picnic where employees can bring their pets.
- Have a party for your team and their families.
- Talk with your employees about their families. If they think it's private, they'll let you know.