

Elizabeth S King

Firstly – who am I and what do I do? I'm a chartered civil engineer and am a Divisional Director within Mott MacDonald. I have two daughters aged 12 and 10 and a very supportive husband also in full time employment.

My initial reason for wanting flexible arrangements was so that I could spend more time with the children - just being a mum. However, as the children get older, I value having a couple of hours at home on my own as a buffer zone for "home and family management" activities that its difficult to squeeze in when you're working full time.

The start of my flexible working was after returning to work after having my second daughter. For the first 4 years I worked 3 full days per week. Once both children were at school full-time, I increased my hours so that I was working 3 full days and two 5 hour days, which enables me to leave work in time to collect the children from school.

Essentials:

1. The reason it works is that I have always had flexible childcare arrangements and contingency plans in case of an emergency. Although I always try and keep to the same two days a week for my short days, I have always been able to swap my short days around, if necessary, to suit work commitments.
2. You need to be on top of everything and keep both home and work diaries up to date.
3. Ensure that your boss understands your reasons for part-time working, any restrictions that this imposes on your working life, the benefits that it brings to you and that they are likely to get more commitment from you as a result. Provided your boss understands this and is supportive then you're onto a winner.
4. Support at home to allow long days when deadlines dictate and over night stays when necessary.
5. Don't listen to the preaching of others. The correct home/work balance is the one that works for you.

Benefits to me:

1. I get to meet the children out of school twice a week. This means that I get all the immediate "after school chatter" which has usually evaporated within an hour of coming out of school (as any parent will know!).
2. I get to meet other parents and can nip into school to see a teacher should I need to.
3. I get some time at home in the day for "home and family management".
4. I can move my time-off around to suit family commitments, such as a parents evening or a child's doctors appointment. This means that I my leave doesn't dwindle away too quickly.

Benefits to my employer:

1. A member of staff who might not work at all if full-time was the only option.
2. A senior member of staff with a happy home/work balance who is less likely to look for a job move.
3. A female technical employee to help with the gender balance in an engineering office.

Disadvantages:

1. Sometimes I'm not at work when people want to contact me. But hey – I'm out of the office a lot anyway – its simply a case of being organised, thinking ahead and making sure that your secretary/colleagues know where you are, when you'll be back and how to contact you if need be.
2. Colleagues tend not to appreciate that I have a full life during my time off and I can't always move my days around at short notice.
3. I don't earn a full salary.
4. Reduced working mobility.

Proof:

Since I've been working part-time I've been promoted through Associate and have been a Divisional Director for five and a half years. I now manage a team of 35 staff and have no reason to believe that my career won't continue to develop.

Caroline Steenberg

I had been working in policy research in a university for several happy years when my immediate boss began thinking of retiring and our current research contract was coming to an end. Whilst I had membership of the RTPI, I had not worked in Local Government, which is important for a professional Town Planner. A job-share post was advertised in the policy and research section of my local planning authority. This was a great career opportunity and a chance to walk to work rather than driving for around four hours every day. I opted to remain for two days doing other research at my university and spent two and half days at the Council. It was lovely having a half day free to do chores, sort out home commitments and walk the dog.

Unfortunately there are time limits on how long one can remain on short term academic research contracts, and after nearly two more years I was reluctantly forced to leave. It has not been easy finding alternative employment that fitted in with my hours at the Council.

Fortunately, a part-time research post became free at Kingston University. The commuting is not too onerous. Interestingly for me it takes me back to a previous life when I worked as a Surveyor.

Essentials

1. I work Monday, Tuesday and part Wednesday at Kingston University, and part Weds, all day Thursday and Friday for the Council.
2. There is some flexibility to enable me to swap round should I have to attend meetings for the "other" job etc.
3. Two half jobs equals more than one whole job. There are two sets of stresses, two diaries to organise, more professional journals and paper work to keep up with, more admin, different email and software packages, etc.
4. a high degree of organisation and a clear head is required.

Benefits to me

1. I get to work in two different environments
2. The roles and cultures of the two jobs are different and the cross disciplinary areas are interesting and feed into each other. I feel I can bring a different perspective and knowledge base to each job and I learn new things from each.
3. I meet two sets of work colleagues.

Benefits to my employer

1. I feel a responsibility to do the work in a shorter time.
2. I have inside knowledge from a different and sometimes opposite perspective.
3. I have an ever increasing work load.
4. Before taking up the latest university post I was available for overtime as and when the work load at the Council required. This occurred most weeks building up to our Local Plan Inquiry.
5. Due to my age, background, education and experience I bring something unique to the tasks given to me.

Disadvantages for the Employers

1. I may be out of the office for a couple of days, so colleagues may have to take messages, as I do for them.
2. Actions may be delayed until I get in.

Disadvantages for me

1. promotion chances are curtailed
2. I'm "out of the loop" when not in at each workplace, so communications are vital.
3. It can be hell if both jobs are busy, heading for deadlines etc.
4. People don't necessarily realise that your week's work has to be done in two and a half days.
5. Inland Revenue don't seem able to get to grips with the concept of two jobs and I always end up paying too much tax.

Evie Bissell

Having been restricted with a very inflexible timetable when I was teaching, the appeal of the flexibility of my present job as technical officer at Richmond Council, enables me to achieve some kind of balance between home life and work.

I am married with two children – a 16 year old son and 12 year old daughter. My husband is in full time employment. We tend to split / share most tasks.

After the birth of my first child I decided to stay at home to look after him. Once he had started nursery school and before the birth of my second child I considered returning to teaching and embarked on a 'Return to Teaching' course. When I realised I was pregnant with my daughter I decided again to stay at home to look after her, delaying my return to teaching.

Time passed, I became heavily involved with children's school activities and worked very part time for friends. The job at the council came up unexpectedly and it fitted in with my arrangements for collecting children after school.

Essentials

1. My regular working hours are 9.00 – 3.00, Mon – Thurs, to enable me to take / collect children from after school sporting activities.
2. Swapping days around enables me to attend school functions, children's medicals etc.,
3. I have to be very organised – teaching was definitely a good foundation for forward planning.
4. My boss is aware of my home commitments and having children of his own, understands my need for flexibility.

Benefits to me

1. I can be as involved with my children as 'they' want (now that they are older and more independent ie: provide a taxi service)
2. I was able to keep abreast of 'happenings' at the school / gate.
3. I can organise my home life without being too exhausted all the time

Benefits to my employer

1. My 6 hours per day are value for money as I don't stop for a lunch (I eat at my desk) and I don't have breaks and I also feel a responsibility to 'get through the work' in a shorter time.
2. If I'm not collecting etc., children after work, I work longer or start earlier at times. Also when the office is particularly busy, I come in on Fridays - I worked most Fridays in 2003.
3. Additional hours are paid out at the normal rate – this is more expensive when/if an agency person is employed
4. I fulfilled the 'part time' job description, so any more flexibility on my part, is a bonus for the Council.
5. Although I'm part time I have an ever increasing work load and responsibility
6. Due to my background and age, I bring a certain standard of education and experience to the work place which I feel enables me to tackle the tasks given to me and deal with the public.

Disadvantages for the Council

1. Although I might be out of the office at the end of each day or on Fridays, colleagues take my messages as I do regularly for them. I always comply with the Council's response times.
2. The Council may now feel that more work could be covered by a full time employee, but part time was the initial offer.

Disadvantage for me

1. Chances of promotion are curtailed.
2. My salary is meagre in comparison to the amount of work I cover.