



SUPERVISOR GUIDE TO FLEXIBLE WORK CONVERSATIONS

Creating an open and honest dialogue about flexible working is one of the keys to creating a true flexible working culture. The most effective way to successfully introduce flexible working is through team-based discussions. These discussions will identify barriers to flexibility and generate practical ideas for overcoming them. They also create a spirit of collaboration and cooperation within a team that helps make flexibility work. You can use our Supervisor Guide to Team Flexibility to hold an effective flexibility discussion with your team.

Whether you're conducting team discussions or not, you will need to have one-on-one conversations about flexibility. It is important to note that the onus is on the employee to create a flexibility arrangement they believe will work for their circumstances, including identifying and mitigating risks. Our Employee Guide to Working Flexibly can help guide their thinking.

This guide is designed to support you to have an effective one-on-one conversation with an employee who is interested in working flexibly. You can use our handy Flexible Working Agreement template to record the key details of your discussion.

CONSIDER STAKEHOLDERS

Identify any stakeholders who may need to be consulted or involved in discussions as the earlier you consult and communicate with interested parties, the easier the implementation of flexibility will be.

Consider:

- People within your team who'd be impacted by this employee working flexibly.
- People elsewhere in the business who the employee works closely with.
- External stakeholders.

ESTABLISH THE REQUIREMENTS

It's not your job to develop individual flexible working agreements, but to facilitate the flexibility your employees are seeking. The best way to do this is to fully understand what your employee needs (as they may not even be fully aware of the options available to them).

- Establish what flexibility options they are considering.
- Determine if the flexibility requested is a permanent, temporary or ad hoc arrangement.
- Confirm if the flexibility is static or dynamic. Ask them if the arrangements need to be the same every week (childcare pick up or set study commitments) or if they can work their flexibility around business needs (leaving at 4pm twice a week to get to the gym or taking a longer lunch once a week to run errands).
- Consider if there any specific tools or technology that can be supplied to enable the flexibility.
- Avoid asking what the flexibility is for. The reason why it's been sought is irrelevant in true flexible cultures. The most critical discussion is finding solutions that work for the employee and the employer.

CONSIDER THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

There will always be challenges that make flexibility a bit tricky, but flexibility can also create opportunities for the business (eg extending client service hours or reducing overhead costs). Ultimately this is a topic best considered at a team level, but it can be beneficial to drill down to the individual level too, particularly if they're in a unique or standalone role.

Consider:

- What are the employee's key responsibilities and how might they limit the flexibility available to them?
- What responsibilities can be delivered differently to enable flexibility?
- Are there any benefits to the business or your clients?

- What cooperation or collaboration between team members would help support flexible working?

COMMUNICATION

It is important to consider how communication will occur with your employee when they're working flexibly, especially if the agreement involves working outside of the office. These expectations need to be clear for both parties for the agreement to be successful. Consider:

- Are there any impacts to communication between you and your employee (problem solving, catch up meetings, QA processes etc)? If so, how can these be overcome?
- Are there any impacts to communication between the employee and others within the team? If so, how can these be overcome?
- How will the employee effectively engage in team meetings or training?
- If the flexibility involves time away from the physical office, how will the team know where the employee is and how they can be contacted?
- If the flexibility includes working less than full-time, what is the communication protocol for urgent work issues during non-work periods?

GIVE AND TAKE

Flexibility is a true two-way street. Generally, employees will be happy to work with you and the business to make their flexible arrangement work, but it's important to have a discreet discussion about what this will look like so everyone is on the same page. Discuss:

- From time to time there may be work impacts that mean the flexibility cannot be provided as agreed (eg something urgent pops up on a day you're due to leave at 4pm). How do you see the flexibility arrangement being amended/honoured in those situations?
- From time to time there may be personal reasons why the flexibility needs to be rearranged at short notice by the employee (eg switching an office day to a work from home day to meet a tradesperson). How will you amend/honour their flexibility in those situations?

REVIEW AND MONITORING

Flexible working should be an ongoing discussion with every employee. Formal review dates are helpful for new arrangements, but you should also leverage opportunities like regular catch ups or performance appraisals to check how flexibility is working for them.

- Set a timeframe to formally review new flexibility arrangements to ensure it's working for everyone (including stakeholders), if not you can renegotiate or wind up the flexibility.
- Discuss how work performance will be monitored (KPIs, metrics, timeframes, budgets, time recording, file reviews, feedback from customers etc).
- Agree on the informal reviews of the flexibility will occur- can they be built into existing one-on-ones or will they just be ad hoc discussions?
- Set an 'out' clause. If the flexibility isn't working for either party at any stage, how will it be wound up?

NEED MORE SUPPORT?

ZEST can help support your flexible working goals through:

- Senior Leadership education and coaching
- Supervisor training and coaching
- Employee training
- Development of policies, strategies and procedures
- Review of existing policies, strategies and procedures
- Creation of entire flexible work programs
- Evaluation of flexible work initiatives

Email enquiries@zestbcc.com.au or call 0423 406 766 to discuss your requirements.