

# [ BIAS INTERRUPTERS ] *small steps big change*

## BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR MANAGERS & ORGANIZATIONS *Tools for Workplace Flexibility*

### THE CHALLENGE

Surveys show time and time again that employees want more flexibility at work, with one finding that 96% of white-collar professionals say they need flexibility.<sup>1</sup> Workers value workplaces that value them. In one study, attrition was cut in half when workers went remote, and telecommuting employees took fewer sick days and less time off.<sup>2</sup>

When workplaces rely on an outdated model of a breadwinner who is always available for work, not only do they exclude most people working today, they also hurt the company's bottom line. According to Cisco, their mobile or remote employees have a voluntary attrition rate a third the size of their office-based employees.<sup>3</sup> Cisco credits this lower attrition rate with \$75 million in annual savings for recruiting, hiring, and training replacements. Other studies have found sharp gains in productivity when workplaces move to telework or build-your-own schedules.<sup>4</sup>

Building a flexible workplace enables employers to promote people based on their talent instead of their schedule.

### THE SOLUTION

Recognize the difference between crisis work and full-time/part-time telework. Working remotely in the midst of a crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic, is not the same as telework during normal times. The first steps to successful telework are childcare and a place to work. Organizations designing a permanent telework scheme typically will balance the productivity gains of telework with the innovation gains of in-office work. For tips on creating a telework policy that works for your organization visit:

<https://trello.com/remote-work-guide>.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. Dean & A. Auerbach, "96% of U.S. Professionals Say They Need Flexibility, but Only 47% Have It," June 2018. Harvard Business Review, <https://hbr.org/2018/06/96-of-u-s-professionals-say-they-need-flexibility-but-only-47-have-it>.

<sup>2</sup> S. Mautz, "A 2-Year Stanford Study Shows the Astonishing Productivity Boost of Working From Home," April 2018. Inc., <https://www.inc.com/scott-mautz/a-2-year-stanford-study-shows-astonishing-productivity-boost-of-working-from-home.html>.

<sup>3</sup> P. Leet, "How Telework Helps Cisco Recruit and Retain Employees," June 2013. Cisco Blogs, <https://blogs.cisco.com/ciscoit/how-telework-helps-cisco-recruit-and-retain-employees>.

<sup>4</sup> Shana Lynch, "Why Working from Home is a 'Future-Looking Technology,'" June 2017. Stanford Graduate School of Business, <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/why-working-home-future-looking-technology>.

<sup>5</sup> For additional remote work tools: <https://blog.trello.com/topic/remote-work>.

- 1. Allow for flex time.** Flex times allows employees to start and end work at times of their own choosing, often within limits (e.g. start times between 7-11 a.m.). Don't assume hourly employees can't participate: having one receptionist work 8-5 and another work 9-6, for example, often benefits an organization.
- 2. Use reduced schedules to expand your talent pool.** Offer reduced scheduling to employees without compromising career advancement opportunities by offering proportional pay, benefits, and advancement. This strategy has been used successfully in law firms, enabling part-time attorneys to become partners. Only 18.2% of professional women and less than one-third of men work more than 40 hours per week, so if your workplace isn't offering a reduced schedule with advancement opportunities, you're missing out.<sup>6</sup>
- 3. Consider offering a wider range of work arrangements.** Seyfarth Shaw LLP's Innovative Staffing Team allows attorneys highly flexible roles that are paid hourly or on a project basis. This enables them to take on as much or as little work as they want. What makes this program effective is that attorneys on this work-as-you-will track are able to transition into all other available roles within the organization, including partner track roles.
- 4. Eliminate the flexibility stigma.** Don't stigmatize people based on schedule. Message clearly and often that promotion depends on talent and work, not on "face time" at the office—and practice what you preach.
- 5. Don't overvalue overwork.** Encouraging your employees to regularly burn the midnight oil hurts more than it helps. Studies dating back to WWI find that chronic overwork (more than 40 hours a week) hurts productivity and more recent studies find that working less than 40 hours a week can increase productivity.<sup>7</sup> In one study, managers couldn't tell the difference between employees who actually worked 80 hours a week and those who pretended to. Pay attention to what an employee's efforts lead to, not how many hours it takes them to get there.

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<sup>6</sup> Gender Inequality, Work Hours, and the Future of Work, 2019. Institute of Women's Policy Research, <https://www.empowerwomen.org/es/resources/documents/2019/11/gender-inequality-work-hours-and-the-future-of-work?lang=en>

<sup>7</sup> Jill Duffy, "What wartime 'munitionettes' can teach us about burnout," September 2019. BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20190912-what-wartime-munitionettes-can-teach-us-about-burnout>;

Sarah Green Carmichael, "The Research is Clear: Long Hours Backfire for People and Companies," August 2015. Harvard Business Review, <https://hbr.org/2015/08/the-research-is-clear-long-hours-backfire-for-people-and-for-companies>; "The Six-Hour Work Day". Ohio University Online Masters Blogs, <https://onlinemasters.ohio.edu/blog/benefits-of-a-shorter-work-week/>; John McNamara, "Create a culture of working less hours and you'll boost productivity. Here's why," February 2018. Sage, <https://www.sagepeople.com/about-us/news-hub/creating-culture-working-less-boost-productivity/#>

- 6. Your benefits send a message; make sure it's the one you want.** Look again at your work culture and employee benefits. Do they match up with the work-life balance values your company claims? Having a power-napping room, dry-cleaning, and free dinner for those who work after 8 p.m. are great, but if those are your only employee benefits, you are sending a strong message that you only value a certain group of employees. Provide a range of benefits that will appeal to employees from different demographics if that's what you want to attract and retain.