

WFA: Managing Oneself to Maximize Productivity (not to mention lots of other good stuff)

This weekend I found myself driving back from a bluebird day spent cross country skiing with three of my closest (and smartest) girlfriends and reflecting on a new informal team policy that we put into effect this year at Health Links we're calling **Work From Anywhere (WFA)**. The topic of the conversation? Flextime. Regardless of who you're talking to, allowing employees to control their work hours ("working-time autonomy") is a controversial workplace policy that hasn't seemed to reach consensus in terms of the science. Researchers in management, occupational health, industrial psychology and other fields have studied the evidence to determine how flextime can counteract work overload or exhaustion and even promote employee productivity and reduce turnover.

Back to the car ride and my own take on work-autonomy. My friends represent the rising professional class of driven career women in their thirties, all in leadership positions, and hoping to find the seemingly untouchable work-life balance we all strive for. How do we juggle our many roles and responsibilities? How do we currently achieve boundaries between work and personal life? How do we prepare for our twenty meetings a week and still get the work done? The car-wide consensus was clear – the alignment between the needs of individuals and the organizations that they are a part of starts with trust and willingness to understand what limitations employees are facing as part of any and all demands at work. For the purpose of this example, I'm not even talking about the direct impacts of flextime on home and family. I'm talking about how flextime is a great (not to mention no cost) tool for creating space to focus and manage time more effectively, especially in the case of employees being able to access work from anywhere, i.e. email, video conferencing, etc.

Why flextime, why WFA?

- Self-managed work gives employees more time autonomy, allowing them to be most effective during varying periods work demands. (*Think about those times you need to dig in and work weekends balanced with times where you can slow down a bit.*)
- Improves worker motivation and efficiency.
- Increases employee productivity, lowers stress, increases work intensity due to fewer interruptions and quieter work environment.
- Employers allowing more job control may be perceived as responsive to growing demand for family-friendly workplace policies.
- Promotes employee and company performance.

That's not to say we shouldn't consider the cons of flexible work schedules. It might not be suitable for everyone or every industry. Some workers might abuse it, and some jobs that require routine tasks won't be able to touch it... yet.

The Takehome: If you're in an industry or work group that can be flexible, a place that can allow employees to make choices about how, where and when they work, then it's time to check in. Do an assessment of how individuals are feeling about time management, projects, commuting, and office interruptions. Ask employees for feedback. Check out the Health Links Resource Center for tips on implementing a flextime policy.

Try WFA: 1 day per week, **work from anywhere.** You decide when, block it on your schedule and pick where and how you need to work in order to get things checked off and in a place where you feel good about your accomplishments.



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