COMMENT NATIONAL OPINION

Why isn't sports carnival and assembly leave a thing?

By **Tammy Tansley**
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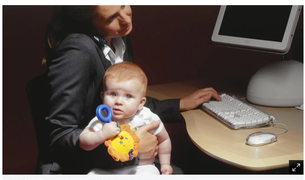
It's the bane of pretty much every working parent – attempting to juggle working commitments with attending sports carnivals, book week parade, swimming carnivals, choir performances and school assemblies.

It can feel like a losing battle, for everyone.



Flexibility in the workplace can benefit both employers and employees. JENWISH 500

Don't go to the school carnival because you're snowed under at work, and your child ends up winning their year level. This isn't a situation I am ever likely to find myself in, given the current sporting prowess of my children, but a friend texted me this morning to say she had missed her daughter winning literally everything because she just couldn't take time off work.

Then of course, there are the employees without childcare responsibilities, who feel frustrated when they look around to see the empty desks and feel as though they are required to pick up the slack.

Or those employees who may not have childcare responsibilities – but do look after elderly parents or their menagerie of animals and wonder why they never get time off.

Tammy Tansley says flexibility in the workplace is the key to better wellbeing.

Or those that feel that if you should have thought these things through before you had children. (I have to say that assemblies and athletics carnivals were about the last thing I was thinking about when considering whether to have kids!)

Many employers do want to give flexibility, but wonder if they ever really get it back? And what about those workplaces that have production lines, where it is almost impossible to stop the line for a couple of hours, or the service stations staffed by only one person.

The collision of life and work is hard.

So, what to do?

Firstly, we need to stop looking at this as an issue that affects just working parents and start looking at what we all need as employers and employees.

Maybe there is room for an approach that recognises that there are times that we may all need time away from work to attend to life outside of work. Whether that is being with a sick pet, taking an elderly parent to a medical appointment, or yes, cheering your child from the sidelines.

There is a significant body of research that now shows that flexibility in the workplace offers a range of benefits to employers.

It has shown to increase innovation, creativity, productivity and motivation, saves costs, lowers absenteeism and turnovers and increased overall organisational performance.

In turn employees save time and money and increase their overall wellbeing by adjusting their work-life balance, both psychological and physical.

Of course there are some employers and workplaces where this happens as a matter of course. Where there is both flexibility for employees and an employer who feels that this is a two way street, and that what they give in flexibility – they get back in other ways.

The next step is to show those other employers that by not allowing flexibility they are missing the potential to improve on a whole lot of organisational indicators, including making more money.

But just adding extra entitlements to employees isn't necessarily the answer. It's not about employees getting more. But rather, that what's already there is looked at through a more flexible lens.

That there is give and take both ways. That flexibility given by the employer is acknowledged and reciprocated by employees.

Flexibility requires a bit of a leap of faith on behalf of employers. Sometimes, they have been burnt before. Sometimes, it all just seems too hard.

What we know though, is that life, in all its delicious messiness, is unlikely to get simpler in the near future.

We need to get our heads around this.

We need to find a way to allow employees to have a life, and for employers to get the most of their employees.

Approaching work flexibly offers that, but it takes a willingness to look at the issue square on, to think a bit outside the box and to consider the implications for our workplaces if we can't get our heads around it.

Tammy Tansley is an author and owner of Tammy Tansley Leadership and Workplace Culture

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Cats Fan 2 YEARS AGO

Wow! So much resentment against people been given a little bit of support to bring up the next generation and when I say people that of course is mainly women. It is usually women who take the children to the dentist or to the doctor and look after them when they are sick. Have a look at what is happening in Japan because of them very very low birth rate. Who do you think is going to go out to work to pay taxes to keep the wheels of society turning if we don't have any children. Who do you think is going to run the aged care facilities and look after you in your old-age . Perhaps we should make the choice if you don't have any children then the next generation doesn't look after you .

RESPECT 0 REPLY

A Citizen 2 YEARS AGO

As a non parent myself I see a lot of absenteeism from parents and while some reasons are genuine (like illness), there are a lot that just take advantage of the smallest of issues... bops I have to go, my kid sneezed'.... sports carnivals and assembly don't count in my opinion, especially if that parent opted for a full time job.

RESPECT 0 REPLY

langhorne 2 YEARS AGO

Absenteeism is widespread in Australia today, regardless of parental status.

Some have earned a bit of slack after decades of work experience.

Many have not.

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Stingray 2 YEARS AGO

So sick of the 'flexibility' offered to parents. Most of them just take the piss and as an employer who can ever question a parent about whether their child was really actually sick or not?

The new norm seems to be that with alot of people being able to work remotely is that they will just 'work from home' on days when they really can't be bothered coming in. I hear it once a week, i'm not feeling well so i will work from home this morning and see how i feel later. That's great that you will access your emails but that's not the same as physically being at work is it. No office walk ins to deal with, no phone calls, no urgent things that pop up from a colleague who needs assistance with something. Just minimize the netflix screen every couple of hours and hit send/receive and you are 'working from home'.

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