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## WHY DOES FLEXIBLE WORKING JUST NOT FEEL THAT FLEXIBLE?

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### FLEXIBLE WORKING IS A GOOD THING, BUT THERE IS STILL RESISTANCE...

Despite the data showing us that flexible working is a good thing for all of us (not just women with kids); and that the benefits to both the organisation and the individual can far outweigh the inconvenience; still there is the lingering perception that flexible working just doesn't feel that flexible. So, how do we change the perception of this and make flexible working something that we can all benefit from?

Research shows us that this is something we need to get our heads around.

- Demographics are changing. There are more families with both parents working than ever before, more families with elder care responsibilities. There are still many families who are affected by separation or divorce.
- Society's expectations are changing. More than ever, men are saying that they want to be able to work flexibly too; whether that is because of family responsibilities or other out of work obligations. Study after study has shown that millennials value flexibility over ever other workforce benefit.
- Dramatic enhancements in technology and changes in globalisation are both driving this change and enabling it.
- The impact of long working hours on poor mental health is becoming more prevalent, and at huge societal and individual cost.

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So, it's something that organisations have to address. But there is still resistance.

- Many organisations view it as something that has to be tolerated when a woman returns from parental leave. But we know that flexible working is not a gender specific issue. More and more men want to work flexibly for family and other reasons.
- Organisations fear that it will be costly and time consuming to manage. Like any new approach, there is time associated with the set up and management of flexible working. But what is the time and cost associated with absenteeism, mental health issues associated with work, lack of morale and productivity? There have been multiple studies showing that flexible working drives benefits for the individual and for the organisation in terms of reduced absenteeism and turnover, and increased productivity and morale and engagement.
- Organisations fear that it will have an impact on customers and clients or that a job is a full time job and that's the only way that it can be done. But the reality of the organisations (big and small) who have introduced flexible working for all roles is that there is invariably a way around that meets the needs of all parties. Flexibility, creativity and a bit of give and take is needed to look at the situation with fresh eyes and see what might be possible.

The reality is that we know that flexible working is possible. Organisations as big as Telstra and as small as boutique law firms have introduced it with great success for both the organisation and the employees.

Flexible working is at its heart a leadership issue. It's not about the policy (although of course that is a good starting point). It's more about the conversations that are taking place and about the role modelling being shown at senior levels. If the most senior of leaders are in at work at 6am and still sending emails in the middle of the night, the implied message from the top is that that is what is value, despite any stated formal policy to the contrary.

The experience of those who have introduced it successfully say that:

- It needs genuine senior leadership buy in and commitment. This means role models, sharing success stories and open conversations.
- It needs trust and a mindset that this is an important issue for all.
- It needs an openness and creativity to ask –“what if” or “how could we” rather than “this is why it won't work”.
- Like any workplace situation good people management is essential, working flexibly is no different.
- It needs good support – policies/procedures/communication mechanisms and technology.

There are some great resources to support the introduction of flexible working below.

- <http://equilibriumchallenge.com.au>
- <https://www.diversecitycareers.com/flex-able-certification>
- <http://www.workplaceleadership.com.au/projects/making-flexibility-work/>
- <https://www.dca.org.au/dca-research/future-flex—mainstreaming-flexibility-by-design.html>
- <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/196058/kids-company-greatest-competition.aspx?version=print>
- <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/employee-entitlements/flexibility-in-the-workplace/flexible-working-arrangements>

So, flexible working can work.

By seeing this as an issue that affects us all and the way that we want to live our lives today. By realising the economic and other drivers that means that this makes good financial sense. By realising that it takes more than just a policy to implement. By looking at this as an issue of leadership – we can make flexible working something that works for us all.

Tammy

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I am energetic and innovative. I am business focused, pragmatic and have a 'can do' approach. I love working with businesses who want to make a difference, who want to change and improve and who want to see what's truly possible. I do this via my two businesses, Tammy Tansley Consulting and Help Me HR.

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