

CHAPTER TWO

WORK SCHEDULES

One of your primary responsibilities in managing employee time is scheduling people correctly. It used to be easy. Almost everybody worked a straight 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM day. They all came in at the same time, left at the same time, and all supervisors had to do was look at the door at 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM and for people straggling in late or trying to sneak out early. Three factors changed all that: technology, growing expectations of government service, and changing needs and lifestyles of employees.

There was a time when we did not communicate much over long distances because we simply did not have the technology. Even telephone service was considered a controlled indulgence. Readers long in tooth will remember the days when government offices with many employees had only one telephone in the entire office. Phone use for anything but local calls was carefully controlled, monitored, and recorded. Most of your communications was done by mail, through meetings, and by visiting people.

As it became easier for us to communicate long distances with technology, giving us tools like cheap unlimited phone use, e-mail, video-conferencing, and other technology, we have become much more flexible in the way we manage our time. It is not uncommon now for government employees to have real-time dealings with people in the Far East, Europe, and every time zone in the United States within the same workday.

The expectations of government agencies have grown, too. As much as we like to think that we have shrunk government, we certainly have not shrunk the expectations people have of those who have survived the shrinkage. The child development center on a military base used to be a place open from 9 AM to 4 PM where military wives dropped the kids off while they went shopping or did chores. Now, these very same places are open from 6 AM to 6 PM because both the husband and wife are in the military and working strange shifts themselves. To make it even worse, the director of the center has fewer employees than when the place was open only a few hours a day.

Lastly, whether we like it or not, the nature of the employee has changed. There was a time when federal employees were paid dramatically less than their counterparts in private industry. That is no longer the case. Now salaries of federal employees exceed those of some of their counterparts in private industry. Federal employees are now in the mainstream of rampant consumerism and

can afford all the toys that are the rewards for their prosperity. They still have the same dedication and work ethic of their parents and grandparents, but what they do away from work has changed the way that they allocate their time. It is not just about leisure time either. Volunteerism, for example, has exploded in this country to an extent unparalleled in the developed world. Once exclusively a province of the elderly retired, federal employees of every age, grade, and occupation are involved in hospice, scouting, search and rescue, food kitchens, tutoring, and every other selfless community activity. The President even signed an Executive Order in 1998 recognizing this and directing federal agencies to accommodate to the maximum extent feasible.

So let us look at how you can schedule work to maximize your employees' effective hours. We will start with the basics of hours of work and then turn to the options available for creative scheduling.

BASIC HOURS OF WORK

The basic rules about work hours and work days are simple: the basic work day is eight hours, and the basic work week is 40 hours during any six-day period of the week (lunch periods do not count as work hours). The federal day starts at 12:01 AM and ends at midnight. The federal week extends from 12:01 AM Sunday to midnight Saturday. Work between 6:00 AM and 6:00 PM is day work. Any *scheduled* work outside those hours is considered night work and requires the agency to give premium pay (unscheduled work outside of those hours comes under the rules for overtime that we will discuss in [Chapter Three](#)).

Within those constraints management has complete discretion in scheduling employees and can direct any desired upon schedule. If you want people coming in at 6:00 AM, they may holler and moan but that is about all they can do about it because you have unfettered authority to set work hours within the above limitations. The only requirement is that you could not make the employee work more than eight hours, plus lunch time, without paying for overtime. If the employee had an hour for lunch, the normal quitting time would then be 3:00 PM, and anything beyond that would generally require overtime pay (I say "generally" because as we will see, the rules on [overtime](#) are complex and labyrinthine).

You have complete flexibility in scheduling all your individual employees. If you want them all coming in at the same time, that is fine. If you want them coming in at staggered times all through the day, that is fine too. Again, remember that as long as the schedule does not start before 6:00 AM or go past 6:00 PM, you do not have to worry about premium pay for night work. As I shall repeat many times throughout this Volume, the determining consideration is the mission of the agency and the needs of the job, not the convenience of the employee. In the best of all possible worlds, we can carefully reconcile and accommodate all

employees' personal and outside needs with the needs of the agency. In the final analysis, though, the job comes first.

These are just the basics of work hours and scheduling. You may still wonder, how innovative can you be? Is there some way an employee could work some hours in the morning, be off for a few hours without taking leave, and then work again in the afternoon? Could people compress their 40 hour work week into longer work days? Indeed they can. Let us now turn to the flexibilities you have using alternative work schedules.

ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULE

The first experiments with different schedules came not because of the needs of employees or of the missions of the agencies, but because of traffic congestion. In 1967 a German aerospace company in the busy Ruhr Valley tried staggered work schedules to try to reduce the numbers of cars on the autobahns at the same time of the day. The idea spread to America in the early 1970s. In 1978 Congress passed the Compressed Work Schedules Act, which allowed a three-year experiment to evaluate the effects of alternative work schedules on efficiency, traffic, energy consumption, public service, morale, and employment opportunities.

A General Accounting Office report showed widespread support among both employees and management, so Congress made the provisions of its earlier law a permanent part of federal civil service law. In this section, we will look at the two broad categories of alternative work schedules, [how to set them up](#), explain the advantages and disadvantages, and discuss the [factors to consider in choosing which to implement](#).

BASIC CONCEPTS OF ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES

Alternative Work Schedules (AWS) is a broad category that includes two basic types: Flexible Work Schedules (FWS) and Compressed Work Schedules (CWS). We will look at the basic components of each right now and then go into detail.

Flexible Work Schedules (FWS)

The five models all split the workday into two types of time: core hours and flexible hours. Employees must be at work during core hours, but can choose other time of reporting and quitting within the flexible bands. The law on FWS allows employees to earn "credit" hours. It is possible for them to work, with your permission and depending upon the system you implement, different numbers of hours that total to either 40 or 80 depending upon the exact type of FWS you choose.

Credit hours are worked at the election of the employee consistent with your agency policies. They are not overtime hours and cannot count for extra compensation. Agency policies may limit the number of credit hours carried over, but the law allows employees to carry no more than 24 hours into the next pay period.

The Five Flexible Work Schedules

You can use whatever creative variations of these models you wish, and include whatever adaptations are necessary for your unique work needs. The five basic types of Flexible Work Schedules to use as models are: Flexitour, Gliding Schedule, Variable Day Schedule, Variable Week Schedule, and Maxiflex.

Flexitour

Flexitour is the simplest and most straightforward. The employee works an eight hour day and 40 hour week, but chooses which eight continuous hours (excluding the standard lunch period), as long as they are within whatever core hours management chooses. Once the employee chooses the schedule, it remains fixed for whatever time period management chooses.

To begin, set the core hours, say 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM. Then allow the employees to choose their starting and quitting times so that they put in their eight hours, as long as they cover those core work hours. At the extremes, an employee under these hours could come in at 8:30 AM and could leave (assuming a half hour lunch) at 5:00 PM. Or, to be able to leave at 3:30 PM, the employee would have to start work at 7:00 AM (again, assuming the same half hour lunch period). It is a permissible variation, though, to allow credit hours if the agency wishes.

Make sure to set the rules for how often employees are allowed to change. Be as strict or as loose as you want. You could make them keep their schedules for a fixed period, say six months, after which they may change. Or you could simply make them come to you when they wished to change and get permission. Flexitour therefore is the most rigid of the different flexible schedules.

Gliding Schedules

A Gliding Schedule is similar to the Flexitour, but the employee can vary the starting and quitting times on a *daily* basis. You set the core hours, just as with Flexitour. The basic workweek requirement is still 40 hours but the employee can change the starting and quitting times anytime.

It is also possible with Gliding Schedules to establish double sets of core hours to allow employees longer periods during the middle of the day. For example, you might set the core hours from 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM and 1:30 PM to 3:30 PM with flexible hours of 6:00 AM to 9:00 AM, 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM, and 3:30 PM to 6:00 PM. An