

The Mental Health Advantages of a **Four-Day Workweek**



The global pandemic has dramatically transformed our approach to work. COVID-19 regulations necessitated a shift to remote work, which led CEOs to find innovative ways to entice an empowered, employee-driven workforce back to the office. As the pendulum swing stabilizes, the emerging middle ground is the enticing prospect of a four-day workweek.

An abbreviated workweek concept has gained significant traction for organizations searching for innovative solutions to support their workforce. While this compressed work schedule promises numerous benefits for employee mental health and work-life balance, giving people the chance to recharge over three days and attack the following week fully rested, it also presents unique challenges for employers.

THE PERKS: ENHANCED MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

A four-day workweek can be a boon for employees, offering a range of mental and physical health benefits. Here's how:

1. Improved Work-Life Balance

With an extra day off, employees have more time to pursue personal interests, spend time with family, and engage in leisure activities. This balance can reduce burnout and increase overall job satisfaction.

2. Reduced Stress

Having an additional day to recharge can significantly lower stress levels. Employees can use this time for self-care, exercise, or simply to relax, leading to better mental health.

3. Increased Productivity

Contrary to the fear that fewer workdays might reduce productivity, studies have shown that a well-rested and happier workforce tends to be more efficient and focused. Streamlining the workday by reducing unnecessary meetings, automating tasks, and working smarter can achieve the same workload in less time. Moreover, the extra day off can result in fewer sick days and a decrease in presenteeism.

4. Enhanced Physical Health

More free time allows employees to engage in physical activities, prepare healthier meals, and attend medical appointments, contributing to better overall health.

5. Why Are They Closed on the Weekend?

Anybody trying to catch up on errands, run to the dry cleaners, take the car to the shop, or get an eye exam, knows how many businesses are closed on Saturday and Sunday. Having extra time during the week to cross off all those items on the to-do list would let your employees reclaim the weekend for a little R&R as intended.



THE CHALLENGES OF THE FOUR-DAYWORKWEEK: NOT ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL

A four-day workweek is an employee-centric perk that offers many benefits. Workers gain one less day of commuting, resulting in savings on gas and that morning's Starbucks, plus a more relaxed morning routine without office attire. For parents of young children, the impact of one less day of paying for daycare can be even more significant. Or, for some working parents who brace for the Friday frights that come before the demands of the weekend, it's an opportunity to reclaim a day for self-care or time with a significant other. But while this worker-friendly perk offers exciting benefits, it is not a perfect solution for every industry.

Employers must consider several factors before making the switch:

1. Industry-Specific Needs

In sectors like healthcare, hospitality, retail, and customer service, continuous coverage is essential. A four-day workweek may not be feasible without significant adjustments to staffing and scheduling.

2. Maintaining Productivity

Ensuring that productivity does not dip is crucial. Employers must set clear expectations and goals to measure performance accurately. This may involve redefining key performance indicators (KPIs) and closely monitoring outcomes. The goal is to make better use of the hours in the week and reduce the need to "fill time," waiting for the clock to strike five o'clock on Friday. For some leaders, it may come down to honestly deciding if they're paying for a worker's results or for their time behind a desk.

3. Cost Implications

Transitioning to a four-day workweek may have financial implications, such as the need for additional staffing or overtime costs. A thorough cost-benefit analysis is necessary to understand the economic impact.

4. Compliance with HR Policies

Implementing a compressed workweek legally and fairly requires employers to navigate a complex web of HR regulations and labor laws. This includes ensuring adherence to wage and hour laws, overtime rules, employee contracts, and various state, local, and federal statutes like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Affordable Care Act (ACA), and Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

5. Payroll, Holidays, and PTO

Determining how hours are documented for payroll and labor laws is critical. Also, company policies around holidays may need to be adjusted. Especially for firms whose employees accrue vacation time based on hours worked. This could pose myriad challenges for organizations with employees in multiple states or working abroad. If you're considering designing a four-day workweek, a whole health strategy can help create a structure that works for you.

[The IMA Whole Health Strategy](#) helps businesses understand the considerations needed to create holistic well-being in their organization but are unsure where to start. The IMA Mental Health Toolkit was created to help employers develop health strategies, benefits, and four-day workweeks custom-tailored to their organization.



SURVEYSAYS!

According to survey data in Benefits Magazine, Vol. 60, No. 6, employers cited the following reasons for implementing a four-day, 32-hour workweek:

41% - Employee request

36% - Retention Strategy

36% - Work-life balance/rethinking company culture

27% - Recruitment strategy

Employers that do not currently offer four-day workweeks indicated the following reasons and concerns:

42% - Lack of interest by upper management

38% - Difficulty implementing it organization-wide

36% - Negative impact on business operations

36% - Unsure if it would work with the organizational structure

32% - Unable to support customer base

MAKING THE TRANSITION: BEST PRACTICES FOR EMPLOYERS

Offering a flexible work schedule can be a game-changer in the competitive landscape of talent acquisition and retention, but it's not as simple as shutting the lights for one additional day per week. Employers have numerous challenges to consider. And just like remote work and unlimited PTO, a four-day workweek is not suitable for everyone.

To successfully implement a four-day workweek, employers should consider the following strategies:

1. Pilot Programs

Start with a trial period to assess the new schedule's feasibility and impact. Gather feedback from employees and make adjustments as needed.

2. Clear Communication

Set clear expectations regarding work hours, responsibilities, and performance metrics. Transparent communication can help manage any concerns or misconceptions about the new schedule.

3. Employee Involvement

Involve employees in the planning process to understand their needs and preferences. This can increase buy-in and ensure the new schedule meets the workforce's expectations.

4. Flexibility and Adaptability

Be prepared to make changes based on feedback and performance data. Flexibility is key to finding a balance that works for both the organization and its employees.

5. HR Readiness

Ensure that HR policies and systems are updated to accommodate the new schedule. This includes payroll adjustments, benefits administration, and labor law compliance.

FUTURE-PROOFING EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

In an era where employee well-being is paramount, the transition to a four-day workweek represents a shift that aligns with modern workforce expectations. This promising solution addresses the growing demand for work-life balance and mental health support, proving that employee well-being and business success are not mutually exclusive. While employers must approach this change with a comprehensive strategy, including pilot programs, clear communication, and employee involvement, companies that successfully transition to this model can enjoy a more engaged and productive workforce. By streamlining work processes, establishing key KPIs, and reducing unnecessary meetings, businesses can enhance productivity and efficiency. The future of work is evolving, and a four-day workweek could be a significant step towards future-proofing employee well-being and organizational success.

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