

Flexible Working: The Van, The Myth, The Dead-End?



We're all guilty of making hasty decisions or assumptions about something we *think* we know, without actually looking at the facts.

This happens with flexible working.

Whilst not a new term, it is one that is oft-misunderstood. If you ask people what comes to mind when they think of working flexibly, answers will vary from: *'I'll be expected to be available all the time'* to *'It's not real work'*. Both are at odds with the truth and we think it's about time the myths were dispelled...

Flexible working is one of the most progressive and indeed effective structures of business. And it will be *even more so* in the future. To help you decide whether you want to change the conversation and become part of the flexible working dialogue, it is time to address the biggest misconceptions and bring its advantages to the fore:

1. It's only for millennials / mothers / moochers.

It may appear that way, but it is in fact, not true. Contrary to popular belief, flexible working does not have to involve hot-desking from the beaches of Borneo to Kuala Lumpur via a clapped-out van. Nor is it reserved for those who want to expand their brood. There is a myth that flexible working is used simply by those who are afraid of hard work. Or the misconception that it's the monopoly of those who want to work part-time. This is certainly no longer the norm; at present, flexible working is regularly done by the most junior employees to senior professionals - all working full-time.

So yes, whilst flexible working may provide the answer for those who want to travel and find themselves / delay soundless sleep for 18 years, it works just as well for those whose commitments may differ and / or aren't fans of the age-old 9 to 5. If you prefer to begin your day at 6am, post yoga / run / Matcha protein shake, that's fine (and commendable) too. Whatever the reason, flexible working can suit anyone *and everyone*.

2. Men don't work flexibly.

Wrong.

In 2012, more than half of female employees and 44% of males said they would take up flexible working *if* it was offered. And by this time last year, *one fifth* of flexible workers were men and *one third* [working flexibly](#) in high earning roles, were also men. Although women have lead the way in this arena for a while, the gender gap in flexible working is closing.

It is clear that rather than a means to an end, flexible working will be *de rigueur* for both men and women in the near future and this myth will rightly, become a thing of the past.

3. It's a dead-end for my career.

This 'myth' is less black and white. We aren't going to pretend this can't happen; it can and for a few, it does. But like many things, your career will reap what you sow. In order to continue pushing forward in the world of business, you have to remain visible, network and take strategic opportunities to get where you want to go. This remains so even when you are working flexibly; you wouldn't readily take the bus with its unexpected traffic, numerous stops, and overly packed deck when you have your own car, so in the same vein, you shouldn't let someone else drive *your* career.

To avoid this happening, before you begin flexible working, do the following:

- **Create short and long-term goals:** identify what skills and experience you need to get your desired role and plan your route.
- **Look at how flexible working can work for you:** create time to fill any gaps in your CV.
- **Network smarter, not harder:** Seek out those that will be most beneficial to your career post flexible working and maintain that relationship.

With some forward planning, rather than be stifled, your career prospects could greatly increase.

4. I'll have less access to the job market.

Although it may appear as though there is one market for flexible workers and another for standard contract workers, in reality, they are one and the same. We acknowledge that there is [room for improvement](#), however there are plans and [campaigns](#) underway to change this.

Following the extension of flexible working legislation in 2014, companies have begun to change their working practices and often accommodate and even promote, flexible working. As such, there has been a discernible impact on the job market - roles are often advertised to include 'opportunities to work flexibly' and some companies, such as DWG, have cultivated their firm's culture to rely solely on remote workers. As employers are competing against each other to attract and retain top professionals; flexible working has now become part of their 'bait' and it is **this** that you can and should be taking advantage of during the recruitment process.

5. It's hard to negotiate

The old adage: *If you don't ask, you don't get* applies here. For those of you that have already climbed a substantial part of the career ladder, you doubtful would have done so without the art of negotiation.

Many uncomfortable conversations happen in the business world, from pay-rise and bonus-related discussions to sabbaticals. Sometimes you just have to rip the band aid off. But the 'pain' can be lessened by following these tips:

- **Choose your moment:** during a review / appraisal meeting or in interview are the ideal times. But if it really can't wait, schedule a

meeting for this purpose; no one wants to discuss changes when their head is elsewhere.

- **Don't go on the offensive:** negotiation is just that; a two-way dialogue, not an ultimatum.
- **Create a mini business plan:** Want to work flexibly? Show how it will benefit your current / future employer. Preempt their questions / reservations and show that not only have you thought it through, but that it really is the best structure for both of you.

6. Businesses don't like it

Quite the opposite actually.

Huge companies like Microsoft and [Vodafone](#) were early adopters of flexible working. The former is so supportive of it, they funded a [study](#) this year to look at the trends at UK-based companies. The results were both surprising and pleasing - they found that over 80% now allow their teams flexibility in how and where they work. In addition, many bosses said flexible working was in fact *necessary* to attract and keep the best staff.

Now, if that isn't businesses giving flexible working the corporate double thumbs up, we don't know what is.