



Five-Day Work Week

Foreword

In the wake of society's increasing attention on work-life balance, more employers have adopted various types of family-friendly employment practices to help employees fulfill their work and family responsibilities simultaneously.

Family-friendly employment practices can generally be grouped into three categories: family leaves, flexible work arrangements and family support. Employers may implement these measures flexibly in accordance with the affordability of organisations and the needs of employees, having regard to the size, resources and culture of individual organisations.

This leaflet introduces **five-day work week**, a flexible work arrangement under family-friendly employment practices, with a view to helping employers and employees better understand its application, benefits and concrete arrangements.

What is a five-day work week?

A **five-day work week** refers to the work arrangements made by employers for employees to work on a **"five-day-work and two-day-off"** pattern.



Is a five-day work week applicable to different modes of operation?

In general, enterprises can implement a five-day work week according to their modes of operations. Common arrangements are as follows:

- **For enterprises opened on weekdays and closed at weekends**
Employees are fixed to have two consecutive days off at weekends.
- **For enterprises opened daily**
For enterprises which require to open or to maintain services for customers on Saturdays and Sundays, a five-day work week can be put in place by arranging:
 - employees to take two fixed days off per week; or
 - employees to work on a "five-day-work, two-day-off" schedule.

Where operational circumstances and staffing arrangements allow, the effectiveness of a five-day work week can be further brought out if employees can be provided with two consecutive days off per week, or the days off are customised to cater for the family needs of employees.

Application example in the services sector

A local retail chain which runs seven days a week has fully implemented the five-day work week for years. The chain management has drawn up a five-day work week roster for frontline sales staff under which they can enjoy one Sunday and one Saturday off as well as a consecutive two-day off period every month. Since its implementation, both staff morale and retail sales have been boosted.



What are the benefits of implementing a five-day work week?

Benefits for employees

- Employees enjoying two days off per week can have sufficient rest. When returning to work, they will be refreshed and work with greater devotion.
- Employees can spend more time for their families and taking care of them. It can help them to relieve stress from coping with work and family commitments.
- Employees' travelling time and expenses on commuting to and from the workplaces can be saved.
- For employees with fewer family commitments, they can utilise their days off for further studies or to develop personal interests.



Benefits for employers

- **Enhance company's efficiency:** As employees can settle their family matters during their days off, they will be more dedicated to work, thus enhancing their work performance and productivity. In turn, the company's efficiency and customer satisfaction will also be uplifted.
- **Reduce absence rate:** A lower rate of absence due to sickness or work accidents may be achieved as employees can be re-charged for work after sufficient rest.
- **Enhance enterprise's competitiveness:** Allowing employees to pursue further studies or develop personal interests helps elevate staff quality and competitiveness of the enterprise.
- **Retain talents:** A five-day work week can foster employees' sense of belonging to the enterprise, thus facilitating staff retention, lowering staff turnover and reducing the time and resources for recruitment and training.
- **Promote corporate image:** The measure can enhance the image of the enterprise as a good employer and create an edge in attracting talents.



How can a five-day work week be implemented?

Vigorous support from the management, thorough planning and solid groundwork are the keys to the successful implementation of a five-day work week. Employers may refer to the following real-life case in working out the arrangements:

Drawing up the policy and objectives Noting an upward trend in staff turnover, the management of a business commodities supplier responded swiftly searching for a solution to retain experienced employees.

Sufficient communication and consultation The company's management engaged different communication channels, including meeting department managers, inviting staff to group discussions, conducting staff opinion questionnaire surveys, etc, to gauge staff views, identify the crux of the matter and map out the solution. The exercise found out that staff in general wished to have more rest time to attend to their family needs. Upon conducting a review to the company's operation and an active consultation with the staff, the management decided to introduce a five-day work week in phases.





Trial and review The company first implemented a five-day work week pilot scheme in the back office and the production department. Apart from their existing day-off on Sundays, staff of these offices were also granted additional days off on Saturdays. The initiative was reviewed six months later. Without affecting customer service, declining staff turnover and improving work efficiency were observed.

Proper implementation and supporting measures Realising that the initiative was well received by both the staff and the customers, the company extended the arrangement of consecutive days off at weekends to the customer service department. Those who were responsible for delivery service were assigned two days off in a week on roster basis. To this end, a computer system was installed to assist staff scheduling, ensuring that goods delivery for customers on Saturdays could be maintained.

Staff training and feedback To make sure that all department heads were fully apprised of and could work to the implementation details, a briefing was specifically organised to invite their feedback and views. Besides, circulars were issued via emails and the company's website to notify all the staff and the customers of the rationale behind the full implementation of a five-day work week and the relevant arrangements.

Practical advice

- In the deliberation of introducing a five-day work week, employers should first review their modes of operation and the terms of appointment stipulated in the employment contracts. On the basis of no increase in employees' conditioned working hours per week, employers should fit the working hours properly into five workdays. At the same time, reasonable working hours should be mindful to safeguard the occupational safety and health of employees.
- Moving to a five-day work week may involve changes in working hours of employees. For example, employees may need to work longer hours every day to make up for the reduced weekly working days. Therefore, employers should fully consult their employees and obtain their consent before making any alterations. Subject to statutory provisions, prior arrangements should be made after staff consultation for days off which coincide with other holidays or for emergencies where employees are required to work. Any agreements made should be reflected in the employment contracts and staff handbooks as appropriate.
- As the implementation of a five-day work week will reduce the number of weekly workdays of employees, enterprises operating more than five days a week should examine their services and manpower requirements. Employers may need to spare a budget for hiring extra staff and purchasing suitable facilities for staff scheduling. To ensure the original service level would be kept up with sufficient manpower, employers may also consider recruiting part-time workers during peak hours.



Other arrangements

- ✓ If a five-day work week is not feasible due to operational constraints, employers may consider reducing the number of weekly workdays from six days to five and a half days, or moving to a "long/short week" schedule to enable employees to work alternate Saturday. Moreover, there are enterprises allowing employees to have additional day-off of one to three days each month by roster arrangements or implement a five-day work week during the off-peak season.
- ✓ In addition to a five-day work week, employers may also bring in other family-friendly employment practices to help employees fulfil their work and family responsibilities, such as family leaves (e.g. marriage leave, paternity leave, parental leave, filial leave, compassionate leave and special casual leave), flexible working hours, home office and compressed work week, etc.

Conclusion

A five-day work week is not restricted to those enterprises closed at weekends. Where resources allow and with thoughtful arrangements, employers can make their employees to have two days off each week for a good rest and care for their families. As a result, not only the employees can build up healthy and harmonious families, the enterprises can also establish a positive image, thus creating a win-win situation for both.

Enquiries

Workplace Consultation Promotion Division
Labour Department

Telephone: 2121 8690

Labour Department Homepage: www.labour.gov.hk

(5/2013)

