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# Flex on the Frontline Checklist

A practical checklist to help employers identify where and how flexibility can work in the frontline and operational roles

# How to create better work-life harmony in frontline roles

We've shown you how much flexibility is wanted and sought after by frontline workers. But you don't have to dive straight in to a four-day working week (unless you want to) to make work and life flow more easily. Here are our top tips for better work-life harmony in frontline roles:

## 1 Advanced notice for shifts

If you can plan ahead and give people more notice of their shifts, including specifics about location if this varies, it gives them more control over the rest of their life. They can book medical appointments, arrange childcare, or just know when they can go for swim or take the dog for a walk. Research by the Living Wage Foundation with 4,000 people found that of the 59% whose jobs involved variable hours or shift work, 62% said they were given less than a week's notice of their schedule.

**"We recognise the importance of giving people the certainty and flexibility they need to plan their lives when it comes to variable shift patterns, and that as much advance planning as possible is vital for success. We're currently working to support our leaders in creating rotas that not only reflect the needs of the people we support, but also give our colleagues the notice they need to achieve a healthy and positive work-life balance – enabling everyone in our charity to live the best life possible."**



Holly Mackay, Head of Employee Relations, Community Integrated Care

## 2 Reliable, predictable shift patterns

If you can create a regular shift pattern, this also helps people have more control over work and life outside because they can anticipate shifts, and plan accordingly. Reducing last-minute changes wherever possible is beneficial too.

**"It's quite stressful (organising childcare) but I like to be organised, and have it all set out, and I'm lucky because there's consistency with my shifts."**



Mother working part-time in education

### 3 Know your team

Understanding someone's personal circumstances can help you create a shift pattern that works. Maybe someone prefers to start and finish earlier so they can collect their children from school, while someone else prefers to work evenings and weekends. Of course, you might not be able to accommodate everyone's preferences all the time. But knowing what employees prefer means you should be able to design rotas that keep people happier in general, and need fewer swaps.

Construction firm **Skanska UK** found workers preferred starting and finishing earlier but this wasn't possible for everyone at the same time because of the nature of the site. However, staggered start and finish times were introduced so teams could take turns at earlier, or later shifts.

### 4 Direct rota input by employees

Have you ever tried letting your team put together their own rota? You might need to intervene if there are gaps. But you can be sure staff are getting more of the shifts they want if they've chosen them directly. Or, you could seek input by asking whether there are any particular dates people would like off, or specific hours for.

**Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS** introduced self-rostering two years ago. Since self-rostering started, their absenteeism has radically reduced and people are happier and healthier. They have less need to use bank staff, so costs are reduced too.

### 5 Easy shift swaps

Make it simple for people to change shifts with a colleague if they need to. There are good apps that can help teams communicate clearly, view rotas and swap shifts quickly, as well as email and group messaging.

**“We aim for self-managed rotas so our Personal Development Workers are directly involved in creating their own rota around the needs of the person they work for. But if something comes up, such as a poorly child, or an opportunity to go to an event and they need to swap a shift, they know they are empowered to contact colleagues in their own team to do this. We have various groups on Whatsapp, Yammer and Teams they can use to do this. And we just ask that they involve the person they are supporting, as it is that person they work for and so is respectful, and means they're not surprised if someone unexpected arrives.”**



Ian Williams, Project Development  
Lead at care provider C-Change

## 6 Small adjustments

Allowing staff to make small, guilt-free adjustments when the unexpected happens – a broken boiler, poorly child or elderly relative who needs support, for example. This makes a huge difference to how stressed people feel, if it's ok to make small changes to their working pattern to deal with something important happening at home.

**“As part of our approach to flexible working, we’ve introduced paid flexible leave so that employees can enjoy a better work-life balance. This means they can take up to three hours at a time from their workday to tend to the commitments that matter to them – such as a medical or personal appointment, school pick-up or family meal. With 85% of these requests being consistently approved by management, it shows that our employees are really benefiting from this.**



Lynne McBurney, Group Head of People, Arnold Clark

## 7 Flexible hours and shifts

Home working usually a no-go for frontline workers. But can your team work more flexible hours? Would part-time hours work for some people in some roles? This can instantly open up roles to more people, especially parents, carers and people with disabilities who can't work full time. It can also save the company money by only paying salaries for the time you really need. Would two people job-sharing be able to deliver the same outcomes for customers? Or compressed hours (doing fewer, longer days)? Would a twilight shift suit some people better, or fewer, longer shifts? Think about what sort of flexibility could work for your teams.

Some employers worry the floodgates will open if they start offering more flexibility. But most people only want relatively small amounts of flex – only about one in every eight workers would like part-time hours.

**Being more creative with shift patterns has benefited Enterprise Rent a Car. They’ve introduced more split-shift options and job-shares, and some branches have deliberately extended their hours to enable more shift working, creating a win-win for employees and customers.**

## 8 Small amounts of home working

Maybe some parts of roles could be done at home. Whether it's admin tasks, some staff meetings or training. Even just a small amount of home working, where possible, can make a difference to someone's busy week.

**“I’m only in the office once or twice a week. The rest of the time I’m out in the community or working from home... Now I can sit down [at the beginning of the week] and go ‘I’m going to do all my visits on these days, use that day for [helping my] mum, that day for paperwork at home’. I’m a lot more in control.”**



Local council family support worker

## 9 Talk about existing flexible working options and wellbeing benefits

Many companies have brilliant support and benefits that some employees have no idea exist. It's an easy win to shout about what you already have. Make sure your staff take their leave entitlement and understand what's available to support parents and carers. Remind them there's an employee network that might be helpful, that there are mental health first aiders they can talk to, or simply flag lunchtime activity classes if you have them. Make sure your people know all the support they can tap in to.

**“Offering great benefits is one thing, making them accessible and understandable to employees is integral. Employees have different needs at different times, and it is our job to make sure that our employees know the support that is available to them through flexible policies, mental health support, finance education and physical wellbeing.”**



Maria Rooney, HR director at The Glenmorangie Company

## 10 Remove unnecessary travel

Some frontline workers, such as social care workers, have to travel to their employer's office first, and then go out on their shift. You can save valuable time for your team, and deliver more for customers, if you brief teams remotely at the start of shifts and let them head directly to their first client.

**“Since changing the working pattern to hybrid working within the quantity surveying team, it has reduced commuting time by two hours in some cases as colleagues can travel directly to sites rather than coming to an office first. Due to the trust placed in the team whilst home working, many feel their productivity has increased as a result.”**



Chris Ryan, Commercial Manager, City Building

## 11 Train great line managers

Managers who can communicate effectively and empathetically with their teams will get the best from them. This includes ensuring colleagues who aren't always sat at computers have the information they need and the ability to share their opinion freely, as well as understanding changes in people's circumstances and being open to sensitive discussions, such as people having too much work.

**“We already have a positive culture where people know they can ask for small ad-hoc changes or swap their working days. And it is important that teams, not just managers, decide the expectations around connection and communication. During the pandemic we did some extra training with line managers and held several coffee break conversations so they could discuss any issues they were having. Having good managers means we get the best from our teams, so we're always looking at how we can support them.”**



Carrie Nisbet, Head of HR, Children 1st