

Flexible Work Arrangements: The Business Case

Fulfilling the University's Mission

"Cornell University aspires to be the exemplary comprehensive research university for the 21st century on the basis of our distinctive status as a private university with a formal public mission." This statement from the Cornell University Strategic Plan, 2008, reflects the university's vision for the future.

To ensure that the university has the best faculty and staff to carry out this vision, supervisors and managers must work with their staff employees to find innovative ways of serving students and other customers, while addressing the complexity of challenges faced by employees who are attempting to "balance" work responsibilities with personal commitment and responsibilities. When this "balance" occurs, employees become increasingly effective both at work and at home.

War on Talent

Like other organizations, Cornell University is facing:

- projected increases in the retirements of its faculty
- a reduced rate of growth in workers age 35 - 44
- significantly increased competition for the recruitment and retention of high performing diverse staff.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the pool of U.S. workers aged 35-44 will shrink by 7% by 2012. Making up about one-third of the U.S. workforce, the 76 million baby boomer generation (born between 1946- 1964), is now beginning to retire. Based on information from AARP, one of the tools that makes an organization an "employer of choice" and encourages the continued employment of productive older workers is the availability of flexible work arrangements. By offering flexible work arrangements, supervisors and employees are given the opportunity rethink how work is accomplished and recognized, enhancing the recruitment and retention of high quality productive employees.

Generational Differences

Generational differences also influence new workforce expectations:

- Generation X (born between 1965-1981) value "balance," flexibility, independence and collaboration.
- Generation Y (born between 1982-2001), characterized by optimism and confidence, values diversity, civic duty, and a work/life system of meaning.
- Both generations seek more flexible and fluid structures in their work environments and desire learning opportunities outside of their current role than do preceding generations (G. Kovary, "Four Generations-Four Approaches to Work: Engaging All," n-Gen People Performance, 2008).

Women in the Workforce

According to the Department of Labor Women's Bureau, women, who make up 46% of today's workforce, still traditionally bear the responsibility of raising children and taking care of family members. They benefit from flexible work arrangements.


According to Working Mother Media:

- 59% of all U.S. employers offer flex time arrangements
- 47% offer telecommuting
- 18% job share arrangements,

whereas almost all those who are listed on Working Mother Magazine's top 100 employers for working mothers offer these programs.

Employer of Choice

President Skorton has said that: "Cornell University will remain focused on the need to attract and retain the best and brightest students, faculty and staff" (Public Statement, Oct. 30, 2008). What does this mean? Interviews with new hires have indicated that the workplace awards Cornell has won recently have aided



in their recruitment to the university. One of the reasons Cornell has made a number of “best employer” lists such as [AARP Best Employers for Workers over 50](#), and [Working Mother 100 Best Employers for Working Mothers](#) is because of the flexible work options available to employees.

Reducing Our Carbon Footprint

Cornell University is taking steps to reduce energy use and to preserve the environment. President Skorton has committed to developing a campus plan for Climate Neutrality by September 2009, often referred to as the Climate Action Plan. The plan will include strategies focusing on green development, energy conservation, fuel mix and renewables, alternative transportation, and carbon offsets. Another initiative, referred to as the Advancing Sustainability Action Plan (ASAP), includes sections related to flexibility in the workplace, such as increasing awareness and utilization of compressed work weeks and flexplace (telecommuting) arrangements.