

## Keep caregiver bias out of your workplace

<http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/31238/keep-caregiver-bias-out-of-your-workplace>

### HR's role: Implementing family-friendly policies, programs

Here's how to go beyond federal non-discrimination requirements to remove barriers to equal employment and cultivate a family-friendly culture.

- Develop, disseminate, and enforce a strong equal employment opportunity policy that clearly addresses the types of conduct that might constitute unlawful discrimination against caregivers. Define relevant terms, including “caregiver” and “caregiving responsibilities”; describe common stereotypes about caregivers that might result in unlawful conduct; and provide examples of prohibited conduct related to employees’ caregiving responsibilities.
- Ensure that managers *at all levels* are aware of, and comply with, the organization’s work-life policies. It’s imperative that front-line supervisors are not only familiar with the policies, but also are supportive of employees who take advantage of available programs.
- With the help of managers, develop specific, job-related qualification standards for each position that reflect the duties, functions, and competencies of the position and minimize the potential for gender stereotyping and other unlawful discrimination against caregivers. Make sure these standards are consistently applied when choosing among candidates for open positions.
- Implement recruitment practices that target individuals with caregiving responsibilities who are looking to enter or return to the workplace. *Example:* Advertise positions in parenting magazines and other publications that are directed at caregivers.
- Monitor compensation practices and performance appraisal systems for patterns of potential discrimination against caregivers. Check that managers are basing performance appraisals on employees’ actual job performance and not on stereotypes about caregivers.
- Review workplace policies that limit employee flexibility, such as fixed hours of work and [mandatory overtime](#), to ensure that they are necessary to business operations. If overtime is required, encourage managers make it as family-friendly as possible. Instruct them to determine whether a voluntary, rather than mandatory, overtime system would meet the needs of their department. If mandatory overtime is unavoidable, require managers to permit employees to schedule overtime in advance so employees can arrange for child care, elder care, or other caregiving responsibilities.
- Respond to complaints of caregiver discrimination efficiently and effectively. Investigate complaints promptly and thoroughly. If necessary, take corrective action and implement preventive measures to resolve the situation and prevent problems from arising in the future.

- Protect against retaliation. Provide clear and credible assurances that employees who file complaints or provide information related to complaints about the unfair treatment of caregivers will be protected from retaliation. Ensure that these anti-retaliation measures are enforced, especially if the complaint is about the employee's immediate supervisor.

### **Time is of the essence**

Help employees make the most of their time, without affecting their work productivity and without giving the impression of favoritism, by:

1. *Allowing flexible schedules when possible.* The ability to come in early in order to leave early (or vice versa) can be utilized for any reason, whether a child's music recital, a parent's doctor's appointment, a pet's vet visit, or an employee's salon appointment. Employees will appreciate not having to burn vacation or personal time in order to attend to these needs.
2. *Not judging a leave request.* Advise supervisors that they should be less concerned with the reason for an employee's time off request when deciding whether to grant the request (e.g., taking a sick parent to the doctor versus going to a concert). Instead, they should look at more objective factors: Does the employee have available time to take? Is the employee's work completed and up to par? Is the request coming at a good time when things are slow, or a bad time when multiple people in the department are already out?
3. *Not requiring one-hour lunches.* Those who get paid by the hour may prefer to take a half-hour lunch and leave a half hour early. Of course, this won't work if there's a need for employees to be physically present for the full day. Keep in mind that leaving "early" may not mean that employees work from 9 to 4:30 instead of their standard 9-to-5 day; it could mean that employees still work from 9 to 5, but because they can take a shorter lunch, they don't have to stay until 5:30 to finish up their work.
4. *Offering information on services employees need.* Survey employees to find out what's on their plates. Do they want advice on selecting a nursing home; a list of lawyers specializing in estate planning; local nutritionists, personal trainers, or wedding planners; do-it-yourself home repair information; or all of the above? Sometimes finding this information is half the time battle.

### **Managers' role: Maintaining family-friendly policies**

Family-friendly policies and programs can actually do more harm than good if managers frown upon employees utilizing them or discourage employees from taking advantage of them in the first place by giving off the impression that those who need flexibility are less committed to the job/company, are slackers, or are less deserving of praise and advancement opportunities. That's because employees will see the policies as nothing more than "window dressing" and resent the company for, in effect, lying to them. To ensure your policies and programs net the intended effects, share the following best practices with all managers.

- Post schedules as early as possible for positions that have changing work schedules. That way, employees can make advance arrangements for personal responsibilities, thereby enabling them to more readily fulfill work responsibilities.
- Work with employees, if possible, to create customized flexible work arrangements that meet the specific needs of the employee and employer.
- Communicate job openings and promotions to all eligible employees, regardless of caregiving responsibilities. Never assume that certain employees will not be interested in positions that require significant travel or working long or unusual hours.
- Focus on applicants' and employees' qualifications for the job in question. Do not ask questions about or comment on their children, plans to start a family, pregnancy, or other caregiving-related issues during hiring interviews, promotion interviews, or [performance reviews](#).
- Identify and remove barriers to re-entry for individuals who have taken leaves of absence from the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities. When reviewing and comparing applicants' or employees' work histories for hiring or promotional purposes, focus on work experience and accomplishments and give the same weight to cumulative relevant experience that would be given to workers with uninterrupted service.
- Develop the potential of employees without regard to caregiving responsibilities. Provide training opportunities to all workers.
- Promote an inclusive [workplace culture](#) that recognizes and appreciates the contributions of all staff members and demonstrates respect for employees' personal lives and obligations.