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Editor's Agenda

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Georgina Dent is an editor, journalist and former lawyer. She is acting editor of *Women's Agenda*.

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A confession: I work flexibly

BY GEORGINA DENT / NOV 14, 2013 9:14AM / / 0

A while back we [ran an article](#) on *Women's Agenda* about employers that don't 'do' flexibility. Before we published the piece I had a coffee with the author, Kate Mills, who is the former *BRW* editor (and my former boss) and the founder and chief executive of Professional Mums.

We laughed – mostly in horror – that these same employers that once insisted they were committed to diversity for the purposes of positive press, were now telling Kate – straight-faced and frankly but behind closed doors - that flexibility and part-time aren't concepts they support. The hypocrisy is revealing. It certainly explains why female representation in the senior ranks of professional organisations remains particularly dismal.

Aside from any mal-intent on the part of some employers Kate and I began discussing another huge barrier that prevents flexibility from being mainstreamed. And that is the lack of understanding about what part-time and flexible work actually mean.

When I started this job I was quite reluctant to tell people that I am working flexibly. My reluctance, in part, stemmed from the fact I wasn't exactly sure how it would work out. But another reason I didn't want to divulge my working arrangements was because I was apprehensive about how it would be received. Would I be considered less suitable for the role or less committed? It seems even I had picked up the subliminal message that flexible working is somehow an inferior path.

I have now been doing it long enough to know that none of those things are true or valid. Self-serving as it sounds working flexibly allows me to do a better job than if I was in the office everyday from 8am til 6pm. Working flexibly makes me work smarter because it forces me to structure my week in a particular way. I have to be organised about what tasks can be done when and my focus is always optimising time management.

I can say with confidence that my output isn't adversely affected by working flexibly. In fact, the opposite is probably true. In some ways the two days I work from home are more productive from an output perspective than my days in the office – without any meetings or distractions – my efficiency and concentration benefit.

I am also discovering the research about the relationship between trust and productivity is true. I really believe I work harder because I can work hard in a manner that suits me and I am grateful that my employer facilitates that: we both win.

I fulfil the requirements of this job around a schedule that allows me to also fulfil the requirements of my personal life. For me, having two small children is the main reason why flexible work suits me at the moment but having kids is not the only reason an employee would need or benefit from flexibility.

I wanted to confess my flexible work arrangements because talking about the different ways jobs can be done is one of the only ways we can turn the old assumptions on their head. Flexible work is not a lark and it is not code for 'not really working'. It is not restricted to particular roles or seniority levels. It is a smarter way to work – for employers and employees. Only a fool would deny someone the option to fulfil the requirements of a particular job with a degree of flexibility.

Do you work flexibly? How does it play out for you?

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Jane · 22 minutes ago

I worked flexibly for a number of years when my children were smaller and one often-overlooked benefit to employers, I think, is that those who are working flexibly - whether in order to facilitate study, care of young children, care of older parents or simply to pursue other interests - are staying in touch with the outside community and developing a wider view in a way that those who work a strict 8 - 6 timetable cannot. There is a danger in an 8 - 6 weekday timetable that workers can lose sight of what it is that they and their business are working towards - not good for the employee or the business.

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Rebecca Reid · an hour ago

I work part time - just 16.5 hours a week but my mind is always on the job in some way. I can switch off when necessary, but I find being aware of what's going on whilst I'm not in the office keeps me aware of priority needs when I am there. I turn my email off at night to spend time with the kids and I don't check email when I'm at uni but the rest of the time is there in the background. I wouldn't have it any other way. My productivity at work is excellent and I am solidly focused for 5 hours. I find working flexibly also means people think twice about booking meetings and will often email/call with a question rather than schedule 30 minutes to discuss it. I commend women who work full time whilst juggling life but am very happy I have "earned" the right to work flexibly with my current employer.

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Lisa Lintern · an hour ago

It just makes me so annoyed that in so many minds the concept of flexible work translate into 'slacker' or 'not serious about their career'. We need a serous shift in mentality. Not only for the sake of people who need flexibility to keep their careers alive, but also to ensure companies can benefit from the huge talent pool that is being denied because of the traditional definition of a working day. Bravo for sharing your story. I hope so many more do.

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