![Sourced - We get people.]

The 'F Word': Understanding Flexibility at Work

Often when we talk to candidates, the word 'flexibility' is offered up as an indication of what they are looking for in their job search – sometimes even more so than remuneration! In our latest Sourced Report, which provides insight into the trends and changes occurring in the Christchurch and Auckland IT sectors, work/life balance and the importance of flexibility really came to the fore. However, what does flexibility actually mean to candidates and how should it be approached by employers?

Understanding Employee Needs

As changes to daily work patterns and new technology open up the opportunity for flexibility in the workplace, it's become more important than ever for employers to understand what their employees are looking for.

This was certainly something we noticed when comparing respondents who were not currently receiving flexibility with those who were. Of those in roles where they were not receiving flexibility, 46.32% stated that they were currently seeking a new role, as opposed to 30% of those who were. This emphasises just how much the use of flexible working initiatives can impact retention. Work/life balance and flexibility have featured highly as an employee priority ever since we started surveying IT professionals four years ago, so it's a trend that is likely to stick around long-term.

The 'F Word'

However, when we talk about "flexibility", what do we mean exactly? The word is often shrouded in a great deal of ambiguity, prompting understandable concerns from employers, who fear that it's solely about remote working, which can have a significant impact on the day-to-day running of a business. In reality, from the conversations that we have with IT professionals, it's clear that the idea of flexibility

means different things to different people. Remote working is just one strategy amongst a wide range of flexibility options that are being explored by employees, and we've found that the majority of people aren't even looking to work from home on a regular basis.

Research from the UK shows that key reasons for wanting flexibility include having more control over work/life balance, cutting down on commuting time, opening up more time to pursue study, and caring for children or other dependents. People don't necessarily want to replace the time the have in the office, but rather, re-order it so that it works better for them overall.

So, for employees, rather than just labelling it the 'F Word', it's important to be specific with what flexibility means to you. Sometimes it can be as simple as having the freedom to pick up the kids after school, spending slightly longer at the gym at lunch time, having more time to pursue further study, cutting down on commuting time, or taking a few leave days during winter to go skiing. As with any negotiation, clear communication is key to getting the desired outcome.

Navigating Risks and Obstacles

Employer concerns around the 'F Word' almost always comes from a 'how business actually works' perspective. Employers are looking to build tight-knit, agile teams that can thrive in a Tech environment where change happens quickly and constantly. A heavy remote-working component – which is often the assumption of what flexibility entails – can be a threat to this if it isn't implemented in the right way.

When it comes to flexibility, our research shows that the value is there for employers when it comes to retention. The challenge once again lies in the communication; opening up the conversation with team members and understanding what they're actually looking for and how that aligns with your needs as an employer.

Remember, neither party in a discussion thinks that they're the bad guy, it's about negotiation and compromise. Be clear and simple in your communications, and take the time to listen to what the other is saying. Appreciate their perspective (or ask them questions until you do!), offer alternatives and be accommodating where you can, and you'll likely end up working towards a solution that works for both parties.

Summary

As flexible working becomes a key requirement for IT professionals, it becomes more important for organisations to weigh up how flexible working can benefit them. Although our research has shown the impact that it can have on retention, it's clear that working from home isn't the be all and end all of a flexibility working policy.

To understand more of the trends and changes affecting your local IT market, view our latest Sourced Report here. Or for help with your IT recruitment needs, get in touch with the team at Sourced.