Workplace: Is flextime good for business?

Employers are getting more flexible—up to a point, said **Lauren Weber** in ***The Wall Street Journal.*** A new survey suggests that while many employers are offering workers more day-to-day flexibility, they're cutting back on more substantial flex options like job sharing and extended leave. This year, 67 percent of businesses say they allow workers to occasionally telecommute, up from 50 percent in 2008. But the number of companies offering job sharing fell from 29 percent to 18 percent; those allowing a temporary break for family issues fell from 64 percent to 52 percent. The very notion of "flexible work appears to be getting less, well, flexible," said **Sarah Halzack** in ***WashingtonPost.com.*** Though workers increasingly want the freedom to work where and when they choose, employers remain wary of offering anything more than the occasional schedule tweak. So while ducking out for a child's piano recital is less of an issue, ask for a schedule overhaul and bosses are simply "less willing to work with you."

Benefits of flextime: 'Surprisingly positive'

That's shortsighted, said **Jena McGregor**, also in ***Washington Post.com.*** "Study after study has shown that employees with flexible work arrangements tend to be healthier, happier, and more productive—and even less likely to want to change jobs." We also know that "remarkable" things tend to happen when you give workers more autonomy, said **Seth Stevenson** in ***Slate.com.*** When Best Buy experimented with giving some employees 100 percent freedom over their schedules, the results were "surprisingly positive." In exchange for the ability to work from anywhere, unlimited vacation and sick days, and an attendance-optional policy for all meetings, workers were held to strict productivity goals. Not only did employees report less stress, better health, and improved morale, the flexible teams' productivity increased 41 percent, while voluntary turnover rates decreased by as much as 90 percent.

So why do workers with flexible schedules often have "less successful careers" than those who put in more face time at the office? said **Max Nisen** in ***Qz.com.*** It often boils down to managers' biases. New research shows managers believe that workers who get an early start are harder working and more disciplined than colleagues who begin work later in the day, even if all workers put in the same number of hours. It's about time we start treating workers like adults, said **Tracy Moore** in ***Jezebel .com.*** What time you start "shouldn't count more than actual working." If you leave people alone to do their job, and judge them on their results, they will probably surprise you. "It seems so simple, and yet, it's so very rare."

What the experts say

Why investors underperform

When it comes to poor returns, investors often have only themselves to blame, said Jason Zweig in *The Wall Street Journal*. The average investor in all U.S. stock funds earned 3.7 percent annually over the past 30 years, but over that same period, the S&P 500 stock index returned 11.1 percent annually. Why did individuals fare so poorly compared with the overall market? "Fear and greed." Investors tend to get nervous when stock prices dip and overeager when they surge, increasing the likelihood that they sell low and buy high, and driving their average return below that of the fund in which they're invested. The best course? Stay the course. Think of a mutual fund as a train that runs from Chicago to San Francisco. Some people who boarded in Iowa might get off in Nevada, but only those who travel the full distance will get the full benefit.

The financial risks of aging

The biggest risk to your nest egg isn't market volatility or inflation, said Howard Gold in *MarketWatch.com*. It's your aging brain. One simple fact of getting older is that there is a "massive drop-off in our own capacity to manage our investments." Because of the predominance of our frontal cortex, where cognitive functions are processed, we "get better and better at investing until we hit our mid-50s." Beyond that, the limbic system, which regulates primal emotions like fear and greed, starts to hold sway. That shift can lead to an uptick in panic selling, like "the kind we saw in 2008–2009." The best bet is to start planning in your 60s by shifting your investments away from alternative markets and individual stocks, and instead stick to a simpler "buy-and-hold strategy."

Be smart about insurance

People make irrational money decisions all the time, especially when it comes to insurance, said Jean Chatzky in *Fortune*. One major mistake is focusing too much on deductibles, which can artificially narrow your options. To get the best policy for your needs, sort first for benefits like preferred providers and leave the deductible comparisons to the end. And beware of bad math. Premiums are often presented in monthly or quarterly amounts, while deductibles appear as annual figures. If you don't convert to a common increment, you may think you're saving money when you're not. And don't sweat the small stuff. "If you can't afford to replace it, insure it." If you can, don't.

Charity of the week

IEF INTERNATIONAL EYE FOUNDATION

Most vision loss is preventable or treatable, but there are 39 million cases of blindness and 246 million cases of impaired vision worldwide, 90 percent of which are in developing countries. For more than 50 years, the **International Eye Foundation (iefusa.org)** has worked to improve access to affordable eye care, corrective glasses, and ophthalmic surgery through its global network of partner clinics and hospitals. IEF experts provide technical training for local ophthalmologists and nurses to ensure high-quality care. The IEF also directly combats the most common causes of blindness—cataracts, trachoma, river blindness, and vitamin A deficiency. Each year, IEF workers administer treatments to prevent 1 million cases of river blindness alone.

Each charity we feature has earned a four-star overall rating from Charity Navigator, which rates not-for-profit organizations on the strength of their finances, their control of administrative and fundraising expenses, and the transparency of their operations. Four stars is the group's highest rating.

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