

Saying 'No' When An Employee Requests A Change In Work Schedule



It would be great if every workplace could create schedules that met the needs of every individual employee. Perhaps more could than do and maybe more should try, however, there are times when it simply is not feasible to accommodate the personal schedule of an individual employee. When this is the situation it can be difficult to say 'No' without creating disharmony. That is why it can be useful to consider these **5 steps** to managing the conversation when you have to say 'No'.

1) Arm yourself with knowledge

- Know your policies and the reasons behind them – this will provide you with content for a response in the event the employee disagrees with your decision. If you do not have a policy, consider adding one after you resolve this current request.
- Know the job contract and position requirements – Understand what the employee agreed to upon hire and determine why the job requires the schedule it requires. Make notes about these reasons and be prepared to share them if necessary.
- Know the precedents – If you have accommodated similar requests from others in the past clarify what sets the requests apart. There may have been reasons of disability accommodation that are confidential or reasons of personal accommodation that you do not want to share. Reasons you may choose to share could include issues of seniority or differences in role, departments or team that enabled you to accommodate the previous request.

2) Clarify reasons

- Theirs – Understand the employee's reasons for the request – When asked and before you respond ask the employee why the request is being made. You may not be able to accommodate the request but this information may enable you to offer an alternative option.
- Yours – Understand your reasons for saying no – you may not need or want to share all but by clarifying your reasons you are better prepared to explain what and if you choose to explain. Knowing your own reasons should also help you communicate your decision with more confidence.

3) Take a Day

- Before responding to a request stop and take a day to consider the request. You

may know immediately that your response will be 'No', but by taking time you show the employee the respect of consideration.

4) Before You offer an extended explanation just say No

- When offering your response be prepared with an explanation but do not go there in any detail unless you must. There are times when the best response is just to say 'I have thought about your request and tried to find a way to accommodate you but I am unable. I am sorry but I have to say 'No', I cannot change your schedule at this time.' Sometimes an honest and sincere, but simple response is the best response.
- Be prepared with a more detailed if asked, but, again, keep it simple. Focus on the workplace and the job functions. Avoid saying if 'I accommodated you I would have to accommodate everyone' because people prefer to consider themselves individuals and want to feel treated as an individual.

5) Leave the door open to compromise or future consideration

- By understanding the reason for the request and by examining the person's specific role you may be able to offer a compromise. Consider the options before you shut the door completely.
- When you have to say 'No' consider if the situation might change such that you could accommodate the request fully or partially at some future time. If there is a sincere possibility you could, say you would be willing to re-examine the request down the road. Consider that future road and clarify if you mean the near or the distant future.
 - If the possibility is weeks out say you will keep the request on your agenda and let them know if anything changes in the next few months.
 - If the possibility is remote, but remains a possibility, you might frame it by saying you will revisit it in 6 months or next year.
 - If you cannot envision a scenario whereby you can reasonably accommodate the request be up front and say that you are not certain this role or organization will ever be able to provide the person with the schedule being sought.

Often deciding 'No' can be easier than saying it. If you approach the conversation prepared you can increase your chances of resolving the situation with a positive outcome.