

# Think Fathers:

How flexible working  
for Dads can work for  
your business



# Introduction

## Getting the balance right

*Speaking to a wide range of successful large and small business, the world of work is changing, and for employers willing to meet the challenge of family-friendly working, the potential benefits are enormous.*

Many fathers want to find a better balance between work and family. According to a recent report from the Equality & Human Rights Commission, while four in ten dads say they spend too little time with their children, the common fear is that a request for flexible working would seriously damage career prospects and be seen to indicate a lack of commitment. At the same time, the report points out that two thirds of fathers would be attracted to a new job if it offered the opportunity to work flexibly.

Meanwhile, countless well-qualified and experienced mothers find themselves either excluded from the workplace or under-employed while their children are young, as a direct result of the lack of job opportunities that encompass flexible and part-time working.

Businesses that embrace family friendly working have an excellent opportunity to attract and retain these talented people and to reduce the costs of recruitment and redundancy, whilst improving the wellbeing of their employees.

The case studies in this booklet demonstrate how employers of different sizes and sectors have got the balance right and how you can do the same in your business.

## The business case

The business case for flexible working couldn't be clearer. There's a wealth of talented people out there, ready to grasp the opportunity to work hours that enable them to balance their family life with work. At a time when tough economic conditions are taking their toll on businesses everywhere, offering staff the chance to work flexibly can help reduce the wage bill as well as cutting costs in other areas.

Smarter working practices can be a creative way to avoid costly redundancies, a number of companies have used these practices during the recession to cut corporate overheads rather than people, and have looked at alternative working patterns to keep talent within the company even at times of reduced demand. These bold steps have helped organisations ride out the recession and will help them emerge in fitter and leaner shape. Now we are entering a period of recovery – make sure you don't get left behind.

Speaking to a wide range of successful businesses profiled in this publication – in industries as diverse as manufacturing; computer software; engineering and design – it's clear that there are huge business benefits to be gained from introducing family-friendly working policies. Employers

speak of a “focused and more motivated workforce,” of staff who are “willing to go the extra mile,” and of an enhanced ability to recruit and retain the best people.

Many have experienced such a positive impact on the bottom line, and on their ability to respond to customer requirements, that they are pro-actively encouraging more employees to work flexibly. And for some employers, commitment to helping staff improve the balance between work and family life has been extended to include other innovative family-friendly benefits such as enhanced paternity and maternity leave; the option to take unpaid leave on top of paid holidays; help funding childcare; and contractual maternity leave that can be transferred from the mother to the father of a new baby.

## **Flexible advantages**

Many of the employers we spoke to who had introduced flexible working to their organisations reported that they were quick to start experiencing benefits to staff moral. In the longer term, increased employee loyalty and motivation results in lower staff turnover and absenteeism and helps attract and retain a talented workforce. Enhanced goodwill and a more flexible attitude on the part of employees can also result in better customer service and help reduce overheads.

BT, a flexible working pioneer, estimates that through family friendly working, including home working, it has saved over £500m in property costs since 2000. The company also reports that flexible working has achieved a staff turnover rate of only 3 per cent, compared to the industry average of 18 per cent; (the percentage over the last 5 years) of its UK female employees, returning to work after taking maternity leave reached 96–99 per cent; and a saving of £10m in fuel in just one year, by cutting fuel consumption by 12 million litres.

## **Flexible working for small businesses**

But it's not just the corporate giants like BT who can use flexible working to their advantage. Small and medium-sized organisations have just as much to gain from a creative approach to working arrangements. For many small companies with ambitions for future growth, a flexible workforce is an ideal match. Parents of young children who are keen to work fewer hours when they join the company may well want to increase their working hours as their children grow up, matching the company's growing demand for staff.

For Karen Ovenden, founder of recruitment software company Hireserve (see page 4/5), flexible working has been at the core of her business' success. “When we started the business we could only offer staff a very few hours work a week but we found there were plenty of talented people out there who were looking for just that opportunity.” She adds: “Over the years our loyal workforce have stayed with us and been able to increase their hours as we have grown and their own children have grown. Flexible working requires a level of trust in your employees and we have had that trust repaid many times over. ”

## But what is family-friendly working

Working practices that are classed as family friendly, and which have been found to benefit businesses many times, include:

- Part-time working and shorter hours
- Job sharing – one full-time job is split between two employees, with hours and days worked agreed between the two
- Home working – workers spend all or part of their week working from home
- Variable start and finish times – enables a business to operate for longer hours
- Term-time working – work is carried out during term times but the salary is spread across 12 months; this can be through pro-rata reduction in annual salary
- Compressed hours – employees work their full hours each week, but do so over fewer than five days, for example, 4 long days a week or 9 long days a fortnight.
- Annualised hours – employees manage their working time over the course of the year working longer some weeks and shorter other averaging out over the year It's a good solution for positions that have peaks and troughs of work
- Time off in lieu – staff take time off to compensate for extra hours worked
- Shift swapping – employees arrange shifts among themselves, providing all shifts are covered

Many forward-thinking employers have already introduced flexible working and you can read about their success stories, and hear the experiences of some of the people who work for them on the pages that follow. Don't miss the tips and advice written by employers, for employers on our final page.

## Hireserve, recruitment software company, Berkshire, 10+ employees

### TIP – Feel the benefit

“Flexible working repays you in spades. You’ll find people become brilliant ambassadors for your company and will go the extra mile for you. Our staff are endlessly flexible and there is an incredible amount of goodwill toward the company.”

Karen Ovenden, Hireserve

### Reach high, stay flexible

For small businesses with big plans for growth, part-time employees with young families might just offer the perfect staffing solution. Flexible working means growing companies can employ staff for shorter hours when children are small, while working hours – and children – can often grow with the business. One ambitious small business that has benefited from using flexible workers is Hireserve, a specialist e-recruitment technology business based in Berkshire. Set up in 1997 by Jeremy and Karen Ovenden, Hireserve now has over 40 clients and an office in the Netherlands.

Three years ago, growth in orders for its recruitment software meant the company needed to expand, taking on technical staff, as well as help with finance, HR and publicity. “It was clear that we would have to bring in skills on a part-time basis because we didn’t need anyone full time,” says Karen Ovenden. “We needed people who could assume a lot of responsibility, and from my own experience of being at home with the children and meeting other parents in a similar situation, I knew there were a lot of well qualified parents – especially mums – out there who would welcome the chance to work in a professional capacity and to do the sorts of hours that we could offer. And I was right.”

### Motivated part-time staff

Ovenden’s experience of working flexibly in a part-time job, where she was able to work term time only, sparked the resolve to use family friendly working practices if the opportunity ever arose. “I was treated well and I knew how that had made me feel very motivated in my job. I was keen that we would look for parents who wanted to work and bring up their children. It’s been a positive experience for us because if you find the right people – and there are plenty out there – it’s a win-win situation.”

The company has three staff working part time to cover finance, HR and publicity. All three are, according to Ovenden, “highly motivated individuals” who can be “endlessly flexible” if they are required to work outside their regular hours. All three are also parents of young children and in return for staff flexibility, if a child is ill, or another emergency arises, Hireserve either allows staff to work from home or take time off.

Finance manager Melanie Cantle is a chartered accountant with 13 years’ experience who worked for a global pharmaceuticals company until the birth of her daughter five years ago. Joining Hireserve in 2007, she now works between eight and 12 hours a week for the company in a role that she describes as broad. “The flexible nature of my job is as much about

the kind of work I do as it is about the hours," says Cantle. "My role is much wider than it would be in a large organisation and can vary from day-to-day accounting to helping to set up the Dutch branch of the company."

Cantle says she feels fortunate to have found a flexible, part-time position that enables her to use her professional skills and experience and that she is as committed to her work as she was in previous full-time roles. "Flexible working gives you the chance to really focus on your role at work because you are not distracted by having to juggle family and work. I pack so much into the hours that I am at work, so it's very efficient for Hireserve."

With over 15 years professional experience in HR and two children aged five and three, Beverly Usher knew it was too good an opportunity to miss when she saw the job of HR manager at local company Hireserve advertised at just a few hours a week. "I wanted to work but, like most mums, my priority was my family so this role was ideal," says Usher. She adds: "The business has grown over the time I've been with Hireserve and so I have increased my hours and my role has grown with it. I'll be happy to work more hours as and when the business needs me to. The flexibility works two ways, which is a really productive arrangement – both for me and for Hireserve."

## Untapped talent

With her team of flexible staff pulling together to help make Hireserve a successful and growing company, Ovenden says she is "amazed" that more small companies do not exploit the potential of a flexible workforce. "There's a pool of untapped talent out there in the form of parents with children who need to work different hours than the regular nine to five," she says. "The sad thing is that many organisations think they can't manage part-time staff but in my experience, part timers put an enormous amount into their work and many more companies could benefit if they altered their attitudes."

**[www.hireserve.com](http://www.hireserve.com)**



## Clock Creative, design agency, Lancashire, 10 employees

### TIP - Be inclusive and adaptable

“Make flexible working accessible to everyone. At the same time make it clear that you are introducing it for the benefit of the business and that it depends on workload and time.

Get everyone pulling together.”

“Formalise flexibility by including it on the appraisal process for all staff, both manager and employee. That way you can ensure it is working. Over the years we have had a couple of staff who have taken advantage so we have learned to become more structured about flexible working. If people want to work from home now we agree beforehand what workload is expected of them. We find that works fine.”

Ann Rimmer, Clock Creative

### Flexible by design

#### *In an industry renowned for its long hours culture, design and PR agency Clock Creative is flying the flag for flexible working*

A decade of long working days in design agencies gave Ann Rimmer clear ideas about how she would run things if she was the boss. Now she is, and her agency, Clock Creative, has won awards for Rimmer’s commitment to flexible working for all her staff. The ability to attract talented people who value work-life balance, has also seen Clock become one of the North West’s leading agencies, with an impressive client list that includes flagship Manchester arts centre The Lowry, and a cluster of pet-product brands.

“I knew when I was working till 10 o’clock at night, and then finding myself back in the office again at 8am to finish a project for a client, that I was neither feeling very creative nor performing at my best,” explains Rimmer. “It seemed that a lot of that pressure was put on us unnecessarily and there was a macho tolerance of a long-hours culture that wasn’t producing results.”

Rimmer set up Clock Creative in Bolton in 1999 and found it difficult to entice the high-calibre staff she needed away from agencies in the more glamorous Manchester city centre. She came up with the idea of introducing flexible working as a cost-effective way of offering potential recruits something beyond what they could expect from other employers.

Clock Creative’s flexible working policy includes innovations such as the option for new parents to take mornings off to recover from a disturbed night with a fractious newborn; as well as home working; and part-time working. The flexible approach also extends to trusting staff to

manage their own workloads so that family essentials such as taking children to and from school can be fitted in around work. Late starts or early finishes are the norm, with staff regularly working from home or working unorthodox hours to ensure projects are delivered on time.

## Working mum

Rimmer, who is also a mum to a five-year-old son and two-year-old daughter, is convinced that, far from encouraging staff to abuse their employer's trust, flexible working has increased productivity and engendered fierce loyalty and commitment from her team. "It's what people need. We shouldn't try and pretend staff don't have families and expect them to put work above everything else. But knowing that there's no conflict and that they can take family time when they need it means they can give more at work. And they do."

Rimmer herself, Clock's creative director, works compressed hours over four days each week, enabling her to spend a day with her children. But among Clock's team of five men and five women, the staff who are fathers of young children have embraced the flexible working option most vigorously. Managing director Mark Taylor moved to Clock when he became disenchanted with the "absolute commitment to work", to the exclusion of family life, demanded by his prior high-powered job for a global chemical company. A dad to two young sons, Taylor says: "I was doing a lot of overseas travel and the impact on my family – and on me as a dad and husband – was terrible. I knew of Clock's reputation as a flexible employer and that was a large factor in wanting to work for the company."

Now in working for Clock a commitment to work is not expected to be "absolute", but can be legitimately and openly balanced with family life.

Although Taylor works full time at Clock, he says it is the more relaxed attitude to working hours that makes the difference. "I try to work a fairly standard day but I have the freedom to pick up my kids, attend parent's evenings or other events at school, all of which I really appreciate. Having a life that I can balance with work, rather than it being overshadowed by my job means I'm happier and more productive as a member of staff."

Design manager, Martin Dickson, dad to two young sons, was also attracted by Clock's reputation for flexibility. After garnering several years experience as a designer on London-based magazines, a move back to the North West was a chance to look for a job that would enable him to work flexibly.

Dickson is able to fulfill a full-time role but work unconventional hours that fit in around his young family. "It's very important to me that I can be flexible. As long as my work is all in hand then that's fine. The atmosphere is totally supportive towards families at Clock which brings out the best in all the staff. There's a sense of loyalty among us here that's borne out of Ann's commitment to everyone's work-life balance."

## Communication is key

"As a line manager there have been a couple of occasions when people's flexible working practices were not quite fitting in with the rest of the team," says Martin, "but with good communication it has always been sorted out. I tell staff that really the onus is on them to make it work and with a bit of creative thinking we always get there."

## Big Yellow Self Storage, Surrey, three or four people

### TIP – Keep managers informed

“Make sure you get your managers on board and give them the support and information they need to implement flexible working. They need to be empowered to say no when a flexible working request is not in the interests of the business.”

Cheryl Hathaway, Big Yellow Self Storage

### Packed with promise

*Despite its widespread workforce Big Yellow Storage is committed to family-friendly working for all employees*

Since it burst on to the self storage market in 1999, Big Yellow Self Storage has forged ahead of its competitors (market share increase) with its bright, clean, modern image.

The company has grown ten-fold in that time and now manages a network

of 60 storage warehouses – or “stores”, as they are known – across England, Scotland and Wales, with a workforce of over 300 staff.

Big Yellow’s modern approach also extends to its family-friendly working policies, which have earned it a place in the 2009 Sunday Times Best Companies to Work For listing, as well as helping the company attract and retain high-calibre staff. But with the majority of employees based at the disparate Big Yellow stores, each of which is staffed by only three or four people, managing an effective and even-handed flexible working policy is a challenge for the company’s HR team.



### The challenge to be flexible

Head of HR, Cheryl Hathaway is based at the Big Yellow head office in Bagshot, where flexible working is the norm. “It’s more straightforward with the 60 staff based here at head office,” she explains. “Flexible working is part of the culture and staff have the technology to work from home when necessary or, in some cases, on a permanent basis.”

But Hathaway and her team try ensure that three or four people in the outposts of the disparate stores also have as much access to flexible working as possible. “It’s a challenge to be flexible when our stores are run by small teams,” she admits. “But we are determined to make it as easy as possible for people to achieve a healthy work-life balance.” Each team is in charge of their own rota, and as long as teams have worked the hours they are contracted to work, and store opening times are covered, then staff are free to start or finish early and to take days off when they need to.

Hathaway says Big Yellow puts a lot of effort into maintaining a culture where employee welfare is put to the fore. Generous maternity and paternity leave entitlements – two weeks fully paid for new fathers – go beyond the statutory requirements and new parents are given a present of vouchers to help with the cost of kitting out a newborn.

### **Loyal, happy staff**

The company's head of sales and marketing, Rob Strachan, has recently returned from paternity leave after the birth of his second daughter and describes the culture at Big Yellow for parents of young families as "absolutely excellent." Strachan is able to leave work early on Thursdays to pick his older daughter up from nursery. He also works from home on Fridays.

"Being able to leave early on a Thursday doesn't seem like a big deal," he says, "but it makes a huge difference to me and my domestic arrangements, and so does working from home on Fridays." Strachan believes the arrangement creates big advantages for the company too. "For a start I can get a lot of work done on a Friday when I am not interrupted by meetings and phone calls. It also makes me feel more trusted and therefore very loyal towards Big Yellow as my employer." He adds: "Moving jobs becomes more unlikely as well, because it would be difficult to say to a new employer that you want to leave early one day a week and work from home a day a week. On top of that, the company gets a happier employee who is less stressed and can make better decisions."

For Big Yellow's HR team, communicating the company's family-friendly message to workers at all its outlets is central to the strategy's success. Hathaway, along with all the company directors, is diligent in visiting stores to ensure staff are happy and feel appreciated. She is also available to staff at all times on the phone and says any employee is welcome to call her with a HR issue.

"We really work hard to make our staff feel valued and we are constantly looking for ways in which we can improve the work-life balance for our employees," says Hathaway. "It makes sense to do things this way because our workforce is happy and productive, and that means we can all get on with being a really successful company."

**[www.bigyellow.co.uk](http://www.bigyellow.co.uk)**



## Loop Customer Management, customer service department for Yorkshire Water, Bradford, 576 employees

### TIP - Lead by Example

“It’s easier for everyone to see the commitment to work-life balance from the top – three out of our seven senior leaders work flexibly. Demonstrating the business case is even more straightforward in a small business. The narrower gap between senior management and employees makes it easier to see the link between employee well-being, high performance and customer satisfaction.”

Laura Wilson, Loop Customer Management

## Flexible call centre keeps customers and staff happy

### *A wide range of working options have made Loop an employer of choice*

The contact centre industry is notorious for high staff turnover rates. But at Yorkshire Water’s customer service facility, Loop Customer Management, a focus on work-life balance and flexible working has proved an invaluable business strategy that makes for happy, motivated staff who are on board for the long haul.

At its Bradford call centre, Loop staff handle 3 million phone calls a year, as well as processing millions of water bills, payments, final notices and letters for YorkshireWater. Average employee turnover for the contact centre industry is a hefty 25 per cent, but among Loop’s 576 employees that figure is just 5 per cent, a testimony to the company’s canny HR policies which offer staff a broad range of working options.

### Work-life balance commitment

Laura Wilson, Loop’s HR support adviser, says the business has been committed to enabling people to balance family and working life since it started back in 2000. “We realised that we would need to root flexible working into our business strategy to attract and retain staff,” she explains. “Because contact centres are seen as rigid places to work, which doesn’t suit most people’s lives, especially when they have children, we wanted to mark ourselves out as being different, to try and retain our experienced staff.”

It’s a strategy that’s clearly working. Loop offers a wide range of flexible working arrangements, all of which have come from employee requests. They include term-time working for parents of children under 14; job sharing; compressed hours worked over four days instead of five; and annualised hours, which enables staff to work longer hours one week and fewer hours the next.

Other flexible leave options include grandparents' leave of five days – one of which is paid – for the birth of a grandchild; and two weeks paternity leave including one week on full pay.

When requests for flexible working are made, the starting point is to say yes, Wilson explains. "Our default position is 'Why not?' This means employees buy into the company culture and strive to support it and help it grow, making Loop the successful business it is."

All flexible working requests are reviewed to see how they can best meet the requirements of the employee and the business. The line manager, HR department and employee together work out how the requested work arrangement can be implemented. Wilson says: "We've been able to adopt a very broad range of flexible working arrangements because, as a call centre, most employees do the same job. This means we can accommodate a number of people working at different times."

### Part-time options

The biggest problem, says Wilson, has been meeting the number of requests from working parents – particularly mothers – who want to take up term-time working. Loop currently has a waiting list for this arrangement and offers part-time working in the meantime to staff who are waiting. "We have different shifts operating between 6.30am and 10pm, so parents can work the most convenient one for them. We also use students, during the holidays, to cover for working parents."

Andrew Milner is a customer relationship manager for Loop, dealing directly with Yorkshire Water's larger corporate clients. He is father to two-year-old Jamie and his partner works as a nurse. Loop's flexible working policy means Milner can take half-to-one day off a week to look after his son when his partner is at work. "They have been really accommodating and I'm usually able to take the days I need off, which is a real help," says Milner. "I feel valued here and know that they care about me. If I didn't have the flexibility Loop offers I think I would probably have to look for another job."

For collections team manager Peter Mandziuk, flexible working is also essential to enable both he and his partner to work. Mandziuk, who has been with Loop for 11 years, works shorter days on two days a week so that he can take his two children to school and nursery and pick them up at home time. He makes up the time on the other three days. "Because I appreciate how much I get from Loop I think I give even more back, and I certainly don't ever look for vacancies elsewhere," he says. "Loop have got it dead right," he adds. "Staff feel loyal towards them because they are respected and treated well. If I was opening a call centre, I'd do what they have done. Flexible working makes such good sense I can't understand why more employers don't do it."

**[www.loop.co.uk](http://www.loop.co.uk)**

## BT, telecommunications, 105,000 employees

### **TIP – Ask your employees what they want**

“Listening to what your employees want is the most important element to creating work-life balance in an organisation”

Caroline Waters, BT

### **BT rings the changes for dads**

*When it comes to flexible working, few companies are as evangelical about the business benefits as telecommunications giant BT*

One of the UK's largest employers, BT has a 105,000-strong workforce, of whom almost 86,000 work flexibly and nearly 15,000 are home based. The rewards, says Caroline Waters, BT's director of people and policy, are manifold, ranging from enhanced staff loyalty and motivation, through to saving on recruitment costs, reduced staff turnover and absenteeism and attracting and retaining a talented workforce. Increased goodwill and a more flexible attitude from staff means better customer service as well as translating into bottom line benefits such as saving the company £500m in property overheads since 2000.



BT has always been ahead of the game with its flexible working policies, realising in the late 1970s that if it was to capitalise on the fast-paced developments in technology and globalisation it would need a workforce that was available 24-7 and 365 days a year. “We were early pioneers in the area,” agrees Waters. “We went down the flexible working route, rather than introducing additional shifts and overtime, and we haven't looked back since. It's worked for us as a business and it's what our people tell us they want too.”

### **Focus groups for dads**

Flexible working options available to all BT staff include term-time and part-time working, job shares and variable start and finish times. The company has also been working with fathers, as a group, for six years, holding regular focus groups to ensure flexible working is meeting their needs.

The family-friendly culture at BT means dads, as well as mums, can talk about their kids at work and be open about wanting to work flexibly for family reasons. It's a contrast to many workplaces so marked that, Waters says, dads refer to being “out” at BT. One such BT

employee is Keith Edwards, a project director who joined BT in 1985. Officially office-based, but often working from home in Buckinghamshire, Edwards has two daughters aged ten and eight. His older daughter, Charlotte, is severely disabled and requires round-the-clock care. She attends the charity-run PACE Centre in nearby Aylesbury on school days.

Working for BT means Edwards is able to work flexibly, which helps enormously, he says. "If I need to take Charlotte to medical appointments or to respite care I can do that, but I make sure I get the job done," he says. "I might start early or work later but as long as the work gets done then the company is happy."

He adds: "There's a level of understanding at BT, which is different to other organisations. They don't think it's odd that a father should want to do things with their child, such as in my case attending hospital appointments with Charlotte. There's that cultural difference with BT, and I suppose I'm proof that it really does bring out the best in people."

Alliance manager Kevin O'Callaghan is another BT dad who has worked flexibly, partly from his home in Somerset, since the 1980s. With three children now in their late teens and early twenties, O'Callaghan looks back on a career that has enabled him to be there for his children with great appreciation. "It has been great for us as a family that I've spent so much more time with my children than other fathers are able to. My kids didn't have to make do with only having their dad there at weekends and holidays because I was working from home, which meant I could have tea with them and see them when they came home from school. It's often the little things and the routine of times spent together that are important."

### **"People want to stay with BT"**

And O'Callaghan is also quick to identify the advantages to his employer. "There are big bonuses for the company. Not least, I would say, are employee's attitudes towards the company, which are extremely positive. BT staff are willing to go the extra mile, if not further, for their employer. People want to stay at BT and it's not hard to see why. I feel fortunate to work for an organisation that looks after its staff and I know I work better, more efficiently as a result."

BT works hard to ensure its flexible working options are meeting the needs of employees as well as the business, and Waters and her team are in constant dialogue with staff to keep satisfaction levels, and productivity levels, on an upward curve. "At BT our philosophy is that we employ the whole person," she says. "People do amazing things in their lives, mostly outside work, so why not use all that potential instead of cramping their spirits with repressive working practices. We're a diverse organisation full of unconventional people and we're proud of that."

**[www.bt.com](http://www.bt.com)**

## **Halcrow, building consultancy, Swindon, 8,500 employees**

### **Engineered for success**

#### *Flexible working is making a positive difference for Halcrow in a male-dominated industry*

In the stereotypically macho world of construction, Halcrow is an international building consultancy firm with a difference. The highly successful company, whose civil engineering projects include the second Severn crossing and the Channel Tunnel rail link, is unique in encompassing a flexible working policy that enables a large number of its male, as well as female, staff to work part time.

Although women still dominate Halcrow's part-time workforce, 40 per cent of the company's part-timers are now men, including some senior managers, according to Mandy Clarke, group HR director at the Swindon-based company. "We make flexible working available to everyone, whether men or women," says Clarke. "It's part of our emphasis on quality of life and enabling our employees to manage their working life in a way that enhances their life outside work."

### **Business benefits**

She says the ethos of flexible working, which includes annualised hours, job shares and compressed hours, has benefited Halcrow in a number of ways. "It improves employee engagement and although we don't always provide the highest salaries, we offer quality of life that enables us to attract the best people. It also means the company can work more flexibly around clients' demands."

Halcrow employs 8,500 staff, in around 50 offices in the UK and 30 worldwide. Its long history of encouraging flexible working led to the company recently being named as a top employer by the Working Families organisation. The company recognised the benefits of flexible working in the early '90s and the opportunity to work flexible hours is now taken up by 90 per cent of UK employees including senior managers such as Ben Hamer, Halcrow's director of maritime business in the UK, Europe and Central Asia.

With two young daughters aged seven and nine, working flexibly has enabled Hamer to achieve a work-life balance that suits both his family and his employer. "When my youngest daughter was born we were struggling, as most people do, to balance work and home life," says Hamer. "I approached my line manager and we agreed on a compressed week worked between Tuesday and Friday, which was ideal for us as a family."

Volunteering as a classroom helper and occasional lunch supervisor at his daughters' school, has not hampered Hamer's career at Halcrow. He has progressed to become director responsible for maritime business in Europe and Asia, and, despite the travelling involved in his global role, he still manages to work from home on Mondays.

"The insight and support of my manager, when my children were very young, has resulted in a healthy, workable balance for me, at no cost – and arguably great benefit – to my employer. It really embodies the ethos of working life at Halcrow," says Hamer. "It's a way of working that brings out the very best in people and engenders tremendous loyalty. I know I feel a great sense of commitment towards the company."

## Female staff on the increase

Halcrow works in construction and the built environment, including road, tunnel and bridge building. It's a male dominated industry where only 9 per cent of workers are women. At Halcrow though, around a third of the UK-based workforce is female, a figure set to rise further as 45 per cent of the company's new graduate trainees are now women.

The proportion of senior women within the company is also on the up, rising from 1 per cent to 5 per cent in the last five years. "We are becoming an employer of choice for bright women graduates who want in a career in engineering," says Clarke. "That's partly down to the emphasis we place on quality of life and enabling our employees to manage their working life in a way that enhances their life outside work. That means we attract the best people and hold on to them."

Clarke says the current economic situation has focused minds at Halcrow. There has been a downturn in work, particularly in the Middle East, and the company is looking to build on its flexible working policies to tide it through the recession. Increasing home working is an option under consideration for staff who want to and can work from home. "We want to maximise our office space," says Clarke, adding that using office space for more hours in the day and encouraging home working could cut overheads.

Clarke is confident though that Halcrow's flexibility will see the company weather the recession. "Flexibility is in our DNA," she says. "It might be a cliché, but happy employees result in good financial performance, happy clients and happy shareholders."

**[www.halcrow.com](http://www.halcrow.com)**

## Weightmans, law firm, Liverpool and UK-wide, 850 staff

### **TIP – Research the benefits, Spread the good news and put the business first**

“Do your research. Look at other organisations that have introduced flexible working or other parent-friendly benefits and judge how successful it has been for them.”

“Make sure you communicate the benefits to staff loudly and clearly to achieve maximum staff engagement and include everyone in the changes.”

“Don’t lose sight of the needs of the business. That should be your first consideration at every stage of implementing flexible working.”

Sue Kay, Weightmans

### **Family-friendly law**

#### *Becoming an employer of choice is helping law firm Weightmans stay ahead of the competition*

For many companies, increasing profitability is a business ambition that has had to be put on hold in the face of challenges presented by the economic downturn. At Liverpool-based commercial law firm Weightmans, however, half-year profits to October 2009 were up 5 per cent on last year to £25.2m, an achievement the firm attributes, partly, to its deliberate attempts to become an employer of choice.

The firm, which employs 850 staff across five UK offices and has made a name in commercial, insurance and public sector legal work, introduced flexible working in 2006 in a bid to attract staff and encourage them to stay with the company. “We know we can’t compete with the big hitting law firms in terms of salary,” admits Weightmans HR manager Sue Kay. “So we started looking at family-friendly employment policies as a way of attracting and retaining staff. Few of our competitors are doing this yet and so it has been tremendously successful for us.”

Flexible working is made available to all Weightmans’ staff and the arrangement has been taken up eagerly by male employees as well as by women. A large number of men work flexibly, on an informal basis, and across the firm 17 men work agreed part-time hours. The flexi-time option available to all staff means that outside the core hours of 10am to 4pm, employees can work either later or earlier than normal, or can accrue extra hours that will entitle them to an extra day’s holiday per month.



Although time sheets still have to be filled in, Kay says the new system relies on a greater degree of trust of staff, which so far has not been abused. "Trusting people empowers them and, we've found, makes them more responsible," she says.

## Competitive edge

Weightmans keeps in touch with staff opinions on all issues of work via quarterly staff forums where the details of flexible working are among the issues thrashed out. The forums are a gauge of employee engagement and the firm takes their findings seriously. "We have adapted," says Kay. "We look closely at what our staff say and we react to their opinions so that we can gain an edge over our competitors."

The firm's commitment to staying competitive by providing cutting edge benefits to staff doesn't stop at flexible working. Paternity leave is a generous two weeks at full pay, and expectant fathers are allowed time off to attend scans and ante-natal appointments. "Again, we do it because it benefits the business," says Sue Kay.

For Weightmans' employees, the opportunity to balance family and working life through flexible working is a benefit few take for granted. Learning and development manager Mike Ode begins his day at 5.40 to arrive in the firm's Liverpool office at 7.20am. Usually the first arrival in the office, Ode's early start means he can leave work at 4pm to pick his son up from nursery.

"I find being in so early means I have quite a stretch of undisturbed quiet time at my desk when I can get loads done," says Ode, whose role means he is sometimes called to the firm's other offices to conduct courses. "Because the firm is flexible about my hours that means I'll be flexible in return. If I'm doing a course that doesn't finish until 5pm, or if I'm in London and will be late back that's no problem and my wife and I work around that, but having the option of an early finish most days means a lot to us as a family. That's partly why I really enjoy working for Weightmans and why I intend to stay with a firm that values me as a whole person, not just as a worker. I'm committed, focused and feel loyal towards my employer, which is why it's such a brilliant win-win situation."

## Leading player

Weightman's 'flexible' approach to HR strategy has helped propel the firm to become a leading legal player in insurance and the public sector, where it represents clients such as NHS trusts, and local police and fire authorities.

"It's too easy to be sceptical," says Kay. "In a lot of organisations there's a fear of introducing something new, but if you have this attitude as a company you could miss the boat. More and more forward-thinking employers are enabling staff to work flexibly, and benefiting from a highly motivated workforce as a result. We are proud to be one of those forward-thinking employers."

**[www.weightmans.com](http://www.weightmans.com)**

## Jaguar Land Rover – automotive manufacturer, West Midlands & Merseyside, 14,500 employees

### TIP – Feel the benefit

“It isn’t just about the financial impact: there has to be a widespread belief within the organisation that this is of value. What you will gain will be increased loyalty, better well-being among employees and a less stressed workforce leading to reduced absence rates. You will maintain staff performance and output and probably get more from people. You’ll become an employer of choice.”

Suzanne Bailey, Jaguar Land Rover

### Driving change and flexibility

*The going may be getting tough for the car industry, but Jaguar Land Rover is counting on its family-friendly policies to keep a leading edge*

Challenging times for manufacturing and the car industry have ushered in some tough changes at Jaguar Land Rover. But with redundancies in 2009 and the planned closure of one of its West Midlands car plants by the middle of the next decade, the company, now owned by Indian group Tata, regards its family-friendly working policies as more important than ever.

Jaguar Land Rover employs 14,500 people to design, manufacture and sell its iconic vehicles, which are still seen, globally, as the epitome of cutting edge design and classic style. The company has turned the male-dominated and macho image of manufacturing on its head by blazing an HR trail that has seen the introduction of pioneering flexible working practices and other family-friendly measures.

Named a Top Employer for Working Families, Jaguar Land Rover’s work life policies are well recognised and are now regularly benchmarked by other organisations with ambitions to introduce family friendly policies of their own. Suzanne Bailey, manager of employee engagement and diversity at the company, explains that family-friendly policies have delivered enormous benefits. “Giving staff the opportunity to work flexibly is an important policy because it means we have an engaged workforce and a low staff turnover,” she says. “It’s not rocket science: we are a better and more efficient business because we promote working practices that enable people to fit working and family life together.”

### Cultural changes on the shop floor

Flexible working is available to all employees at Jaguar Land Rover, a culture change which more traditional areas of the company found difficult to adapt to initially. “A high proportion of our work is on the production line and there was some resistance,” explains Bailey. “The mindset in the past has been that ‘we need people to cover the shift’. But there’s now increasing flexibility and managers are becoming more open to considering different working patterns.”

These days employees work part time and in job share arrangements across the company, and even on the production line job sharing and part-time working is not uncommon. Some production workers who don’t want to work night shifts have been offered the opportunity to

work permanent day shifts. The company looks for volunteers to cover the night shifts from those employees who prefer to work nights for their own work-life balance reasons. "It is not just for women," says Bailey. "Men are also feeling that they can come forward."

Although numbers of male flexible workers are still low, they are increasing as flexible working becomes more acceptable for men such as order control supervisor, Mark Pollock, whose job involves liaising with the company's overseas offices on international orders for Land Rover vehicles. "It's an important job, especially in these economically difficult times when every order really counts," says Pollock.

## Work-life balance

Manager of a team of six, three of whom work part time. Since January 2009 Pollock has worked a four-day week, enabling him to spend Fridays at home with his 14-month-old daughter Georgina. He is deeply appreciative of his working pattern: "To me work isn't all about the money, although obviously that is important. When I was a kid my dad worked seven days a week and we never had quality time with him. I vowed that if I had children I would be there for them as much as I could."

Pollock believes that working part time has also helped him to focus more effectively on his job. "I have a better quality of life now that the work-life balance has changed and that has made all the difference because I'm not worrying about Georgina and domestic issues while I'm at work. It has given me a new perspective and actually a sharper focus. That's been borne out by my excellent appraisals at work too."

He adds: "I don't think there are enough dads doing what I do and being able to spend time with their kids. I know there are a whole range of reasons for that, but it's partly cultural. Somehow it's perceived as a weakness if a man wants to be with his family rather than constantly at work. I hope that will change."

**[www.jaguarlandrover.com](http://www.jaguarlandrover.com)**



## Simplyhealth, health cash plan and health insurance provider, Andover, 1,200 staff

### **TIP – Ask your employees what they want, Spread the good news and Feel the benefit**

“For our clients, the way we treat our staff demonstrates that we really do practice what we preach when it comes to caring about health and wellbeing. This strengthens our message and marks us out as a trustworthy brand.”

“It’s a good idea to use employee ambassadors to communicate and discuss with other staff what the company is offering them and why.”

Helen Dickinson, Simplyhealth

## **A healthy attitude to work**

### *Flexible working and a raft of other benefits ensure health plan provider Simplyhealth goes the extra mile for its working parents*

“In a world where so many people can’t be bothered, we’re proud to be the ones who can,” is the message proclaimed by health cash plan and insurance provider Simplyhealth. But, as staff are keen to testify, the slogan goes far beyond the promotion of a brand that has health and wellbeing at its core. For Simplyhealth, the company’s commitment to helping customers take care of themselves and their families is complemented by a long history of benevolence towards its employees that is repaid by a highly motivated and engaged workforce with low staff turnover levels.

## **Happy and healthy staff**

Staff at Simplyhealth have access to a range of over 20 benefits, aimed at helping employees at different stages of their working life. From financial help with student loan payments, to paid time off to help plan a retirement, some of the most valued benefits are those that enable working parents to create a healthier work-life balance.

Most useful, say employees, is the option to work flexibly, from working compressed hours to accrue extra days off, to variable start and finish times. Helen Dickinson, Simplyhealth’s head of people, development and delivery, says the company believes a stress-free workforce is vital to the success of the business. “To us it’s really important that our staff are happy and healthy. Our company philosophy is about going the extra mile for customers, and we know that our workforce will go the extra mile for Simplyhealth because they feel supported and valued. We always try our best to accommodate individual requests to work flexibly.”

The company runs an annual employee engagement survey and regular staff forums to ensure the company's ideas on what helps staff achieve a healthy work-life balance and keeps engagement levels soaring are in line with what employees want." We keep on identifying new benefits that we can offer," says Dickinson." In 2008 we introduced childcare vouchers. In 2009 we added the employee health cash plan." Other benefits that parents say really make a difference include a paid day off work when a child starts a new school or nursery and £200 maternity grant – for new mothers or fathers – on the birth of a child, as well as generous maternity and paternity packages.

But flexible working is at the heart of the loyalty expressed by Simplyhealth's workforce. The company's 1,200 staff, many of whom are based at call centres in Andover, Bristol, Leeds and Manchester, between them work over 900 different shift patterns. Many are full-time, but part-time hours range from seven to 35 a week.

Compressed hours, such as working nine longer days in a fortnight are a popular option, enabling parents such as the company's head of IT, Matthew Wilson – a father of two – to spend extra time every fortnight with their children. "My extra day off every fortnight means that I can take my sons to school and be there at home time to pick them up," says Wilson. "I feel more involved with their schoolwork because on those days I can see their teachers if I need to."

### **Enormous motivation**

According to Wilson, the company's caring attitude instills good feeling and enormous motivation among staff. "It's more than just a job to most people who work for Simplyhealth," he says. "There's no pressure on employees to reciprocate and be flexible in return but I do that because I want to show my appreciation. The company definitely gets more out of me because it enables me to work around family life."

Information security and business continuity manager, Stacey Close, is also a dad to two young sons, and feels lucky to be able to balance home and working life, thanks to his employer: "The great thing about Simplyhealth's attitude to flexibility is that we are trusted to manage our own workload. That enables us to take time out for things like school plays, doctor's appointments and so on." He adds: "The Company know that these things are very important and we all appreciate the fact that we are trusted to get on with our jobs. That means that we are more productive and unlikely to be looking for new jobs. Friends of mine with more standard working conditions are really envious of the benefits I enjoy as a routine part of my job and I know I'm lucky. I try and repay that in my attitude to work."

**[www.simplyhealth.co.uk](http://www.simplyhealth.co.uk)**

## Lloyds TSB, financial services, 60,000 employees

### TIP – Be Partners

“It’s really important to recognise that flexibility is a two-way street, where colleagues and their managers work in partnership together to create win-win situations. We’ve found that exploring opportunities to get a better work-life balance on a team basis can be incredibly effective, improving life for everyone involved, and often increasing team effectiveness into the bargain!”

(Sally Evans, Lloyds TSB)

### Flexible working adds up for Lloyds TSB

Part of the largest retail bank in the UK, Lloyds TSB relies on its flexible working and family policies to compete globally, in rapidly changing markets. Delivering financial services 24 hours a day is a tall order that has seen Lloyds TSB introduce an innovative range of work-life balance policies over the past decade, all designed to ensure an engaged, motivated workforce, committed to giving top notch performance levels to their employer.

For Lloyds TSB, the shift to flexible working began in 1999, when the bank introduced the option for all staff to request to work flexibly. “We moved away from the assumption that work-life balance was only an issue for women with children,” explains senior manager for group diversity, Sally Evans. “Flexibility became an option for all staff at all levels, whatever their reason for wanting it – and we gave managers a toolkit which meant they could make robust, objective business decisions on requests. They felt supported.”

The initial driver for Lloyds TSB’s proactive approach toward flexible working was staff retention. The bank was increasingly losing senior men, for whom working flexibly was seen as a career killer, with poor work-life balance the most commonly cited reason for the decision to leave. But flexible working – including part-time working, job shares, variable or compressed hours and term-time working – along with a raft of other family leave and pay policies – has changed everything.

“Now we’re retaining people we would otherwise have lost,” says Evans. “Flexible working is totally accepted as a possibility for everyone and our employees and their line managers can have an open and honest conversation about the individual’s need for flexibility and how this can be balanced against the needs of the business to create a win-win situation. And our reputation as an employer that’s committed to work-life balance helps us attract and recruit the best talent too.”

New fathers at Lloyds TSB are entitled to two weeks fully paid paternity leave and up to 52 weeks partner’s leave for fathers who are the main carer for the child. These benefits are also available to same sex partners.

As flexibility has developed the number of men, particularly fathers, requesting flexible working and taking up paternity leave, partner’s leave and leave for parents has grown and it’s become much more accepted in the organisation that fathers want to be fully involved in their children’s upbringing. “Our plans are still ambitious,” says Evans. “At a time when bonuses and higher

pay will be difficult, flexibility becomes even more important. You really do show that you are the best place to work at times like these. Flexibility has become part of our DNA, and we never underestimate how our staff value having greater control over their time."

A significant proportion of Lloyds TSB's workforce now works flexible hours, with a mix of formal and informal arrangements in place. Flexible working is encouraged among senior staff, who become role models for other employees.

Chris Addison, a managing director for Lloyds TSB and father of two, works a compressed fortnight that allows him to spend more time with his family. He says: "Flexible working is crucial in allowing my partner and me to achieve an acceptable balance and in enabling me to play an active part in both of my children's lives." He adds: "Lloyds TSB have made the right move in going down the flexible working route because it really brings out the best in people. I know that I am far more motivated, focused and committed to my job as a direct result of having the extra time at home."

And for assistant manager Mark Fraser, the ability to work flexibly is also a major benefit. "I have joint custody of my daughter," says Fraser. "Thanks to flexible working I can play an active part in her upbringing. For me this is one of the key benefits of working for Lloyds TSB. Because I can be a proper dad to my daughter by spending quality time with her it means I am less stressed and more focused at work. I work a variable fortnight, starting at 9.30am some days and finishing at 4.30pm others. "

For Evans, the feedback from over 10,500 respondents to an internal survey of staff in 2008 is clear evidence of the continued business case for flexible working. The research showed that for 65 per cent of employees who had joined the organisation recently, Lloyds TSB's work-life balance provisions were "important" in their decision to join the company. It also found that staff who worked flexibly were happier with their work pattern and more likely to achieve outstanding performance ratings. "We know our people place tremendous value on our flexible working and family policies" says Evans. "We know this makes them feel positive about the organisation and have a strong intention to stay."

The company is also leading the field nationally in employment benefits for parents, many of which go far beyond current legislation. This is one of the reasons why Lloyds TSB was named by the charity Working Families as one of the UK's Top 20 employers for working parents in 2009.

Childcare vouchers and the option to buy or sell up to five days leave per annum are also popular perks that complement the range of policies in place. "We wanted to make a public statement to our current and potential staff, to our customers, to the broader community and to our competitors" says Evans. "We don't follow the pack. We are the best place to work."

**[www.lloydstsb.com](http://www.lloydstsb.com)**

## Tips for flexible working practices

### Time for a change

*Business people in the know offer tips and advice on how to introduce family-friendly working to your organisation*

#### Be Partners

"It's really important to recognise that flexibility is a two-way street, where colleagues and their managers work in partnership together to create win-win situations. We've found that exploring opportunities to get a better work-life balance on a team basis can be incredibly effective, improving life for everyone involved, and often increasing team effectiveness into the bargain!"

(Sally Evans, Lloyds TSB).

#### Research the benefits

"Do your research. Look at other organisations that have introduced flexible working or other parent-friendly benefits and judge how successful it has been for them."

Sue Kay, Weightmans

#### Ask your employees

"Listening to what your employees want is the most important element to creating work-life balance in an organisation"

Caroline Waters, BT

"Talk to your people. They will tell you what really makes a difference to them, and will also have sensible ideas about what measures are reasonable and practical. You can put in very complex benefits that take a lot of time to implement but often it is the simplest things that have the biggest impact on staff."

Helen Dickinson, Simplyhealth

#### Put the business first

"Don't lose sight of the needs of the business. That should be your first consideration at every stage of implementing flexible working."

Sue Kay, Weightmans

#### Be inclusive

"Make flexible working accessible to everyone. At the same time make it clear that you are introducing it for the benefit of the business and that it depends on workload and time. Get everyone pulling together."

Ann Rimmer, Clock Creative

## Keep managers informed

“Make sure you get your managers on board and give them the support and information they need to implement flexible working. They need to be empowered to say no when a flexible working request is not in the interests of the business.”

Cheryl Hathaway, Big Yellow Self Storage

## Spread the good news

“Make sure you communicate the benefits to staff loudly and clearly to achieve maximum staff engagement and include everyone in the changes.”

Sue Kay, Weightmans

“Use employee ambassadors to communicate and discuss with other staff what the company is offering them and why.”

Helen Dickinson, Simplyhealth

## Be adaptable

“Flexible working is a learning process. For example, we found that job sharing didn’t work for us as a creative agency. We had two designers who job shared but it was difficult to make sure there was a proper handover each time so there was not a good enough continuity of service for the client.

“Make flexible working more formal by including it in the appraisal process. That way you can ensure it is working. Over the years we have had a couple of staff who have taken advantage so we have learned to become more structured about flexible working. If people want to work from home now we agree beforehand what workload is expected of them. We find that works fine.”

Ann Rimmer, Clock Creative

## Lead by example

“It’s easier for everyone to see the commitment to work-life balance from the top – three out of our seven senior leaders work flexibly. Demonstrating the business case is even more straightforward in a small business. The narrower gap between senior management and employees makes it easier to see the link between employee well-being, high performance and customer satisfaction.”

Laura Wilson, Loop Customer Management

## Feel the benefit!

“It isn’t just about the financial impact: there has to be a widespread belief within the organisation that this is of value. What you will gain will be increased loyalty, better well-being among employees and a less stressed workforce leading to reduced absence rates. You will maintain staff performance and output and probably get more from people. You’ll become an employer of choice.”

Suzanne Bailey, Jaguar Land Rover

"For our clients, the way we treat our staff demonstrates that we really do practice what we preach when it comes to caring about health and wellbeing. This strengthens our message and marks us out as a trustworthy brand."

**Helen Dickinson, Simplyhealth**

"Flexible working repays you in spades. You'll find people become brilliant ambassadors for your company and will go the extra mile for you. Our staff are endlessly flexible and there is an incredible amount of goodwill toward the company."

**Karen Ounden, Hireserve**

## Flexible working – they are wrong

The world of work is changing as more and more businesses discover and implement innovative working methods which improve productivity and customer service, save them money, and enable employees to balance their work and personal lives. But despite the growing trend toward flexible working, there's still some resistance.

So, here are some of the common myths about flexible working and why there wrong:

### 1. "It's just not suitable for our kind of business"

From production lines to customer service organisations, business experience has shown that there are very few jobs that aren't improved by the introduction of greater flexibility. What's important is that changes to how you organise work benefit your organisation, your people and your customers. Have a look at our case studies on Jaguar Land Rover (p.XXX) and Loop Customer Management (p.XXX) for a couple of inspiring examples of companies that have approached flexible working in an innovative way, with great success.

### 2. "Flexible working is only for big companies"

Not any more. Flexible working uses technology to help get the best from your people and this is just as important for the smaller business. A recent survey by YouGov for BT Business found that 59 per cent of small business directors felt that their organisations were just as able as larger companies to implement new ways of working. And a recent British Chambers of Commerce survey revealed that 62.3 per cent of small businesses offered flexible working patterns; 70 per cent noted an improvement in employee relations and over 50 per cent noted an improvement in productivity.

### 3 "If I can't see my staff, they'll do less work"

A lot of entrepreneurs worry about this but the key is to use key performance indicators which enable you to measure productivity objectively. Time spent in the office isn't necessarily all productive so don't be tempted to judge based on this alone. A target met at home is better than one missed at work. And allowing staff greater flexibility over managing their time and giving them easy access to instant communications helps them respond more quickly.

### 4. "It's too expensive to set up"

It needn't be. You can start with a relatively small investment in the things that will make the most immediate impact and add more services as you choose. Bringing all your communications together over a converged network can reduce the overall cost of your communications and drive your business productivity. Workers will waste less time travelling to and from work, and can be more productive in their day-to-day jobs; through flexible working, staff enjoy gaining more control over how and when they work. The business benefits for employers can include higher staff morale and lower employee churn.

### **5. “If staff can access our files from outside, so can hackers”**

Basic security measures such as firewalls and anti-virus software can deny hackers access to your data and systems whether you are working in the workplace, at home or on the road. Using a virtual private network extends the security protection of your office network to any location, allowing access only to authorised staff.

### **6. “Home workers will feel isolated”**

It’s a possibility, depending on the personality of the individual, but regular online meetings and other day-to-day working links can effectively deal with this. A touchdown space gives remote workers a home in the office and reminds everyone that the team includes people who aren’t always there face-to-face.

### **7. “Flexible working is just for mums with young children.”**

The demand for flexible working from employees and from customers is on the increase as both men and women are realising that jobs don’t have to come at the expense of time with their family. Employees want more say in when and where they work, and customers expect services and products to be available at times when they want them. More and more people are demanding control over the way they work and a life outside of the office. People are also realising that jobs don’t always have to come at the expense of learning a new skill outside of work or being packed like sardines onto a rush hour train.



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