

Why four-day workweeks are on the rise

By [Anna Davies](#)

August 31, 2015 | 7:00am



As more and more companies realize the benefits of flexible schedules, a four-day workweek may soon become a reality for many employees. Photo: Shutterstock

It's a Wednesday afternoon, and East Village resident Kara is just leaving a yoga class, en route to a catch-up lunch with an old friend. The 27-year-old, who asked that her real name not be used for professional reasons, isn't a freelancer or unemployed. Technically, she's on the clock as an online editor and, with the blessings of her manager, getting paid roughly \$75 an hour for what looks like a midweek day of leisure.

"I do more than 40 hours a week of work, but it may not be on the 'typical' office schedule. I'll do my work on my own time, but regularly having a day out of the office makes me more excited and motivated," she explains, adding that her "work from home" day is unofficial.

It's a policy more companies are adopting — a smart move, according to some career experts, especially in light of a 2013 analysis from the research firm Global Workplace Analytics, which found that up to 78 percent of employees who call out sick actually are using the time to fulfill personal needs.



Uniqlo recently announced that it would allow 10,000 employees in Japan to work 10-hour days in exchange for working only four days a week. Photo: Zuma Press

Global clothing chain Uniqlo [made waves earlier this month](#) by announcing that it would allow 10,000 employees in Japan to work 10-hour days, four days a week, but similar strategies are only quietly being employed in corporate settings throughout the New York area. Whether to retain talent, to use as leverage rather than a raise, or to take advantage of technological innovations, flexible schedules are routinely offered, but may require a bit of digging.

Law firms throughout the New York metro area often offer the option of “full-time flex time,” where employees can have a work-from-home day — as long as they hit their billable hours, says Deborah Epstein Henry, founder of Flex-Time Lawyers, a legal workplace consulting and advocacy firm.

Despite these schedules, Henry notes that “flexible” doesn’t mean off the clock. “While some law firms offer four-day-a-week options, statistics show that employees who take advantage of that opportunity lose out in terms of partner-track opportunities.”

For other companies, it's a way to compensate workers if they can't afford to pay salaries that match those of a competitor. “We compensate by offering highly flexible schedules,” explains William Bauer, managing director of Secaucus, NJ-based Royce, a leather-goods manufacturing company. The company offers employees no-work Fridays and half-day Wednesdays, allowing its workers to take advantage of these opportunities whenever they want, including in the same week. Just one-quarter of the staff takes advantage of this perk on any given day, but Bauer believes the option makes everyone feel more empowered.

And statistics back up his belief: A 2015 study by Staples found that 59 percent of employees whose offices offer flexible schedules say it's a key factor in productivity. Similarly, Jeff

Fernandez, CEO of video-training platform Grovo, allows his staff to shape their schedules based on what makes sense for their work-and-life balance. “Everyone who works on my staff is committed, so that means I trust them to take a flex day or work-from-home day when they need it,” explains Fernandez.

Far more common are situations like Kara’s, where employees are technically “working from home” one day a week, even if they’re mainly working through their personal to-do list and plan to finish their tasks on their own time. Career analysts predict this type of arrangement will only become more common as productivity is measured less in face time and more in results.

“People will have more freedom to determine which hours to work, as long as they get the work done,” explains Bill Jensen, consultant to Fortune 500 companies, who adds that individual managers can often see the benefits of such an arrangement more clearly than HR.



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“There’s a lot companies are up against in publicly providing a uniform four-day-a-week schedule,” explains Roy Cohen, author of [“The Wall Street Professional’s Survival Guide.”](#) “People expect an office to be occupied during the workweek.”

That said, experts say you can see if it makes sense to create the schedule for yourself. Once you have a few wins under your belt at a company, have a conversation with your manager. The trick, Cohen says, is to make it clear how being out of the office will benefit them: Maybe taking a day off can help you work on long-term projects, scout out the competition, or keep the day open for client meetings that may arise.

Career expert Roy Cohen says there’s a lot companies are up against in publicly providing a uniform four-day-a-week schedule.

Photo: Handout