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Nancy Thomas works flextime for Standard Register in Dayton. The flexible schedule allows her to care for her 4-year-old daughter, Jessica, and work at home in Mason. B2B Staff photo by Ty Greenlees

# Flex scheduling

Area companies increase productivity, retain talent following this growing workplace trend

By Kristin McAllister  
B2B Staff Writer

The American Dream. It's having it all — the family, home and a great career, right?

Now picture this: It's closing in on 5 o'clock and you've got to stop by your elderly father's house on your way home from work to see that he's eaten and taken his medications. Then it's off to pick

up your daughter at day care and the dry cleaning needed for an 8 a.m. business flight. That's followed by a swing through the grocery store, then home to make dinner and get the kids to soccer practice by 6:30 p.m.

After all that, it's time to do the dishes, prepare the ready-ahead meals for your family to eat in your absence, feed the dog, go through the mail, pick up the kids from practice, do laundry, pack, get the kids to

***"It's worked out great from home, and my daughter's in heaven because I'm able to spend more time with her. I'm very appreciative of Standard Register for allowing me to do it."***

***— Nancy Thomas,  
corporate risk manager,  
Standard Register***

bed and go there yourself.

The American Dream, or an American nightmare?

Too often, obtaining professional success comes at the expense of our personal lives. Likewise, having a happy home life often means passing up promotions and high-profile business trips.

Ironically, it is the balance of work and home life that serves as the foundation for the American Dream — something that employers in the region such as LexisNexis, MetLife, Standard Register, The Reynolds and Reynolds Co. and IKEA are recognizing and now offering staff through flexible work schedules.

For Nancy Thomas, a corporate risk manager for Dayton-based Standard Register, having a flexible work schedule since June 2006 has allowed her to skip the day care routine and care for her 4-year-old daughter, Jessica, during the work week.

"They've been great," Thomas said of her employer, a global leader of document services. "It's worked out great from home, and my daughter's in heaven because I'm able to spend more time with her. I'm very appreciative of Standard Register for allowing me to do it."

Standard Register has about 3,500 employees nationwide, with the bulk — up to 500 — in Dayton.

In 2003, it formally instituted a flex-time policy, which states that employees who participate in one must be present during the core business hours of 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, said Amy

Reilly, human resources vice president.

Flexible schedules are tailored around those core hours, she said.

Standard Register also provides flexible work arrangements outside its formal policy. Among those plans is the compressed work schedule, in which an employee works four 10-hour days. Another example are virtual positions. In those, employees — usually sales and account representatives — work from home.

Thomas said she has friends who also would like to work a flexible schedule, but whose employer won't bend on the matter.

"The risk they run," she said, "is in losing top talent if they don't work with those employees in helping to accommodate them."

Heather Head, a customer service representative for MetLife, concurred with Thomas, saying that by allowing her to work a flexible part-time schedule, her company has created a life-time promoter of it.

"I ran into a high school friend who has a daughter five months older than mine and who's looking for a job with flexible hours," Head said. "I told her to come work for MetLife because they're so great. And even with a flex schedule, you get to continue the benefits."

Head works for the Miami Twp. branch of the New York-based company, which, for more than 30 years, has had flexible work arrangements. The company has 48,000 employees worldwide, with 36,000 in the United States.

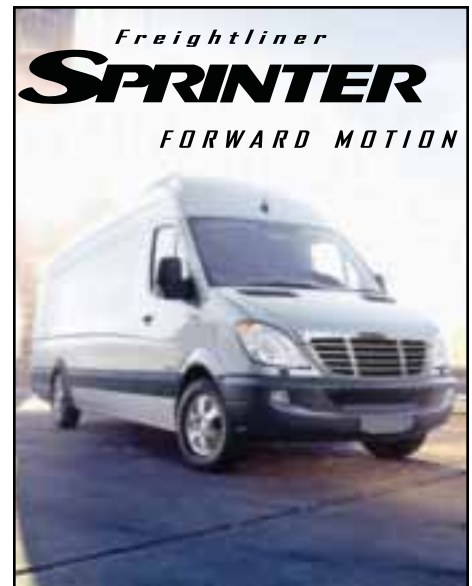
As of 2004, 12 percent of MetLife's non-sales associates participated in a formal flexible schedule, which may include part time, job sharing, flextime, telecommuting or a compressed work week.

Head said the end result in MetLife accommodating her is the satisfaction realized by both her and her employer.

"It really motivates me to work as hard for them as I possibly can," she said. "Anytime they need me to work a different schedule, I immediately say yes, just because they are so flexible with me. I plan on retiring here."

Flexible schedules — good for employees, good for companies

In fact, in a recent study by the Families and Work Institute, data show that



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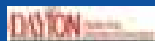
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A flexible schedule enables Nancy Thomas to spend more time with her daughter, Jessica. B2B Staff photo by Ty Greenlees

"employees in effective and flexible workplaces are more likely to be engaged in helping their organizations succeed, more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, more likely to stay with their employer and more likely to be in better mental health."

However, much depends on whether an employee's job is well-suited to a flexible work schedule, said Tracy Miller, a professor of business management at the University of Dayton.

"Overall, the trend is, and has been, increasing to offer flexibility in the workplace," she said. "But there are some things to consider."

By that, Miller said people seeking flexible jobs need to be honest in assessing their ability to work at one.

"You have to be disciplined, productive and really want to make it work," she said. "It doesn't work for everybody. Some may try it out and find that they need to be in a more structured situation. The responsibility really lies with the employee to make it successful."

The advantage for the employer, Miller said, is the high retention rate experienced by those that offer flexible work schedules.

On the flip side is the challenge in keeping open the lines of communication between employers with employees working flexible schedules, Miller said.

"You may find yourself checking e-mails more when you're not working, just to stay apprised," she said, noting that an employee may find him or herself working harder than colleagues who maintain regular work schedules.

"Because they're not seen as much at work, they may actually work harder than if they were not on a flex schedule," she

said.

"It's not just position specific. It's person specific, meaning that some employees are able to manage their work flow and get their work done in a nontraditional environment or schedule," said Linda Simpson, vice president of human resources for LexisNexis, an online information services and publishing company based in Miami Twp.

"The managers are very supportive in working with employees where it might be possible to do a flexible schedule in a way that still meets the needs of the business," she said.

"People love it," Simpson said. "They really appreciate that the company is supporting them and making an attempt to show some respect in work and family balance. Some say they're more productive that way, and they definitely seem happier."

For that reason, flexible work schedules are gaining increasing importance with companies.

"It generally makes for a higher performing company," Simpson said.

Dyanne Tramontana, work life programs manager for MetLife, said her company puts a lot of energy into its flexible schedule program.

"We do it because of the type of talent we're trying to recruit and retain, and we're trying to help them to succeed in their professional and personal life," she said.

"We have tracked our associates on flexible schedules and we see increased productivity and increased morale," Tramontana said. "They consistently come back really enthusiastic about their employment at MetLife and their performance ratings are

on the higher end of the rating scale.”

Tramontana credits MetLife for creating several tools in helping both managers and employees who work flexible schedules achieve success.

“It speaks to our commitment to flex work arrangements, and we’re really proud of that,” she said. “We consider that a great option for recruiting diverse populations and in diverse geographies.”

## A morphing work force

Miller, with the University of Dayton, noted the changing landscape of job seekers, citing the advent of retirees returning to work who may want only part-time hours, or those who need a stable job while pursuing a new career.

“It’s no longer just the mother looking to take care of her children,” Miller said. “There are all kinds of family situations and schedules — day care for children, care of parents.”

Recruiters are seeing more job candi-

dates turn down job relocations if a flexible schedule isn’t part of the package, said Simpson of LexisNexis.

The company employs 13,000 worldwide and 3,000 in the Miami Valley.

“It’s creating a need for employers to have more flexibility in their work schedules, but not all jobs lend themselves to flex work schedules,” she said.

At LexisNexis, however, “We literally have hundreds of employees who are home-based.”

While her company does not have a formal flexible work schedule policy, Simpson said it accommodates employees when possible.

“We’re seeing different dynamics in a number of different ways, such as not just women, but guys who want to work from home,” she said, citing stay-at-home dads as one of the company’s growing employee populations.

Contact this reporter at (937) 225-9338 or [kmcallister@DaytonDailyNews.com](mailto:kmcallister@DaytonDailyNews.com).

## Flexwork breakdown

*What is a flexible work schedule?*

It’s having flexibility to define how, when and where work gets done and how careers are organized, according to the Families and Work Institute.

*Who should participate?*

Any employee who needs flexibility in his or her work schedule to better balance job, family and personal demands, such as child care, an elderly parent or other family member care, or even to pursue a new career or degree.

*Is there more than one type?*

Yes, and flexible schedules fall into one of two categories — a formal policy or an informal work arrangement.

- Traditional flextime: Employee selects starting and quitting times within a range of core-operating hours.
- Daily flextime: Employee selects starting and quitting times within a range surrounding core-operating hours and on a daily basis.
- Compressed work week: Employee works allotted hours over fewer days.
- Part-time work: Job sharing is also a form of part-time work.
- Part-year work: Working reduced hours on an annual, rather than

daily or weekly, basis.

*What are the pros?*

Studies by the Families and Work Institute indicate that companies with flexible work schedules attract greater numbers of talent, have higher employee retention rates and improved productivity.

Employees of companies with flexible schedules, according to data, have greater job satisfaction and morale, and reduced stress and job burnout.

*What are the challenges?*

An employee seeking a flexible schedule must assess his or her ability to work less structured hours, be self-disciplined, technologically equipped, which may require special approvals from an employer, and willing to stay available and in communication with your employer, sometimes more often than employees working regular schedules.

*What can companies do if they can not offer flexible work schedules?*

Companies may consider giving their managers authority to work through an employee’s needs on a case-by-case basis.

Companies may also want to consider creating a task force to consider options and create a plan.



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