

**Workplace Flexibility Case Study**  
**The Detroit Regional Chamber's Flexible Work Schedules**  
by Ken Giglio

**Company:** Detroit Regional Chamber ([www.detroitchamber.com](http://www.detroitchamber.com))

**Company profile:** The Detroit Regional Chamber is the largest chamber of commerce in the country, with more than 21,000 business members. The Chamber's mission is to lead business growth and member success through business attraction efforts, public policy advocacy, strategic partnerships, and products and services for its members. The Chamber employs 88 people, 54 of whom are female, 34 of whom are male. The average age of its workers is 40, with the vast majority having worked at the Chamber for 15 years or less. Most of its workers have received a bachelor's degree, with nearly one-quarter having achieved a master's degree or higher.

**Program profile:** As part of its effort to offer a flexible workplace, the Chamber works with its employees to produce a flexible schedule that is tailor-made to meet the needs of both the Chamber and the individual employee. For instance, between 10%-15% of Chamber employees are engaged in a standard flexible schedule, whereby they come in earlier and leave the office earlier than they normally would. For others, it means a reduced lunch hour, allowing them to leave early. Others still telecommute from home 1-2 days per week. The Chamber also has one long-time employee on a part-year schedule (see Personal Profile, below). The key for the Chamber is to make sure that jobs are being done and objectives are being met by each employee. The Chamber's chief financial officer lives and works in Japan, where her husband was transferred by his job. For the Chamber, flexibility also includes offering a variety of programs for its employees during work hours such as "lunch and learn" sessions, kick-boxing, aerobics and Pilates classes. The Chamber has come to believe that many employees would seek out these healthy options on their own, but time and convenience often prevent them from taking advantage. This way, the classes are convenient and the employees don't have to sacrifice their own personal time to attend. As long as the employees get their work done, the Chamber is eager to arrange such options. It is incumbent upon the employee who desires a flexible schedule to speak with his or her supervisor about any such plans. Again, as long as individual work objectives are being met, the Chamber is happy to work with the employee on a flexibility plan.

**Benefits to employer:** The Chamber has realized a significant increase in its employee retention rate since implementing its multifaceted flexibility program for employees. The Chamber says over the past five years, its retention rate has ranged between 88% - 90%. Prior to 2000, when many of its flexibility options were begun, retention was at 75%. The high rates of retention also compare favorably with employee retention in the region. According to the American Society of Employers, its 2005 Salary Survey for Southeast Michigan showed turnover rates of 8.5% for exempt employees and 17.6% for non-exempt workers. Average tenure for Chamber employees is 7 years.

**Benefits to employee:** Employees feel that the Chamber’s package of benefits, including its flexibility offerings, tend to attract and keep valued employees, making it a highly desirable place to work. In that regard, employees feel a great sense of camaraderie and pride towards their coworkers and their job. Employees also report a strong sense of belonging and fulfillment from working in an environment in which employees are given so much flexibility. Ultimately, they speak of a feeling of being refreshed and recharged by the many flexibility options available to them, which translates into improved performance and productivity. Recently, in a survey conducted by the Great Place to Work Institute for its 2005 “Best Small & Medium Companies to Work for in America”, Chamber staff responded 100% to the statement, “I am able to take time off from work when I think it’s necessary.”

**The Challenge:** The Detroit Regional Chamber’s main concern in considering a more flexible workplace was to find a way to recruit and retain top talent. In order to do so, the chamber says, “You have to be flexible.” There are some positions, such as receptionist or switchboard, where certain types of flexibility are more difficult to accommodate. But, the company says such situations are covered in its employee manual and are often discussed in the interview process. Sometimes, it implements a probationary period to make sure a particular flexibility option will work within the confines of the job.

**Lessons Learned:** At the Detroit Regional Chamber, having workplace flexibility is just something they do. It’s not something they “think too hard” about, however, in terms of whether individual flexibility options will work out. That’s not to say they don’t keep an eye on such things, though. The Chamber utilizes a thorough performance review process so that employees are fully aware of what’s expected of them.

**Personal profile:** Kay Wasinger, Manager, Signature Events, works part-year, from December to mid-June. She has been at the Chamber for 11 years and works in a five-person department, that handles local events put on by the Chamber. Her primary responsibility is a conference that takes places around Memorial Day. After having begun her career at the Chamber on a temporary basis, she grew into a full-time position, which she held for about three years. At that point, she realized that she wanted more time off and approached her managers, saying that she would either work part-time, or have to quit. They jointly came up with the part-year plan. During the months that she works, she puts in full-time hours. Kay continues to have access to benefits, including her 401(k) and health benefits. She is also eligible for merit increases and bonuses.

“As I grew older and had more grandchildren, time became more important to me than the money I would get from working full-year. And, while I still enjoy the work I do, I wanted to scale back. This part-year schedule has given me the combination of having the mental stimulation and social interaction I get from work along with having the time off to do other things I enjoy.”

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