

Workplace Flexibility Case Study
Xerox and Social Service Leave
by Ken Giglio

Company: Xerox (www.xerox.com)

Company profile: Xerox is a \$15.7 billion technology and services company that employs 58,100 people worldwide, including 32,100 in the United States. Of those, about one third are women. There are about 2,500 Xerox workers represented by labor unions in the United States and Canada. Xerox is ranked 130th on the Fortune 500 list and is based in Stamford, CT.

Program profile: Social Service Leave is a program that Xerox has been conducting since 1971. It is considered the oldest such program in the country. Employers are given fully paid leaves of absence for periods ranging from 3 to 12 months to work full-time on social action projects of their own choosing and design. The company estimates that each year approximately 50 to 75 requests for leave are considered, with generally between 6 to 12 requests granted. Over the years, hundreds of employees have taken advantage of the program, working on such efforts as counseling drug addicts, providing legal aid to the poor and building a model classroom for mentally disabled children. The program is open to employees from all job categories and functions. The only requirement for eligibility is that employees must have at least three years of seniority at Xerox before applying; there are no service or other requirements following completion of the program.

Through 2004, 266 men have participated in the program while 187 women have participated (men make up two-thirds of the company's U.S. work force). Interested employees must make a formal, written request to participate in the program but they do not need a supervisor's approval. Applications are evaluated by an employee selection committee made up of a cross-section of Xerox employees. There is a correlation between employees who take advantage of Xerox's Social Service Leave program and those who take part in a separate program, called Xerox Community Involvement Program, which helps support volunteering by providing capital to employee teams pursuing volunteer projects on their own time.

Benefits to Employees: Leave takers are able to become involved in worthwhile causes and return to their previous jobs refreshed and energized by their experience. They are able to retain all of their company benefits and continue earning vacation time while keeping their union seniority. The program was begun as a way to help Xerox employees enrich their lives beyond their jobs; feedback from participants suggests the program is effective in doing so. There is an additional benefit as well, realized by the co-workers of those who participate in Social Service Leave. Company officials say that not only do participants take pride in their selection to participate in SSL, but so do their team members.

Benefits to Employer: Xerox believes that one of the benefits it receives from offering the Social Service Leave program is that it gives employees a feeling of support from Xerox. In other words, it allows the company to assist employees in achieving personal goals and gives them the flexibility to be able to do so. Xerox feels that process translates to improved employee satisfaction and motivation, which ultimately can lead to stronger loyalty to the company. This loyalty helps reduce turnover costs for the company. Additionally, it allows Xerox to enhance its corporate self-identity as a socially responsible company. Xerox officials have a deeply-held belief that when volunteers pitch in to help build stronger communities, everyone benefits – including local employers.

The Challenge: Because Xerox conceived its Social Service Leave program as a benefit for employees and the communities in which they live, it wasn't developed as a result of a particular challenge. However, the company was responding to employee requests for ways to get more out of their lives than just work. In addition, communities were hoping for more from business and industry.

Personal profile: Sales executive Nancy Scott, from Durham, North Carolina, took part in the Social Service Leave program in 1998, volunteering at the Durham Literacy Council to help promote adult literacy. She says it was gratifying to her to be able to bring the problem-solving skills she learned at Xerox to a local nonprofit and to see immediate, positive results. "I was struck by the difference even one person can make...and of the applicability of business principles to nonprofit organizations."

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