



## INSIDE CORPORATE ACCOUNTING AND CONSULTING

# The even more flexible workplace

The accounting and advisory firm Berdon prides itself on being one of the few firms in the industry that offers a 35-hour week.

Berdon has embraced teleworking, available to all employees two days a month, and summer Fridays. In the latter, employees work a compressed workweek and take every other Friday off. They are broken into two groups to make sure the firm always has enough staffing.

"It's been very well received and an integral part of our work life integration strategy," said Karen Bennett, director of human resources.

The firm negotiates flexible work arrangements individually.

"The overriding strategy is to work smart," Chief Operating Officer Rebecca Goodman-Stephens said. "We're enabling [members of] our workforce to work wherever they need to be productive and meet client needs."

Workplace flexibility is a powerful tool in attracting and retaining employees in an industry once known for tight deadlines and long hours.

In a survey conducted this year, ConvergenceCoaching found that 96% of accounting firms offer some form of flexible

work arrangements. Flexibility appeals to both millennials who grew up in a digital world and want to work when and where they want and to many midlife workers who juggle work and family responsibilities.

"It's where the industry is going," Goodman-Stephens said. "The A players are going to perform even better if you accommodate them."

One key trend in accounting is embracing "core" office hours. For instance, workers might have

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to be available from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., but they could start earlier or later and adjust the time they leave accordingly.

"What we've done is replaced the nine-to-five," said Harriet Greenberg, co-managing partner of Friedman, a firm that has core hours.

Many firms are offering remote work arrangements at unprecedented levels.

"Everyone is cognizant of the fact that, with technology, you can work from your house just as well, if not better," said Abe Schlissfeld, co-partner-in-charge of the real

estate group at Marks Paneth.

Given the tough commute many employees face at a time of aging infrastructure, offering remote work options gives a firm a competitive edge with workers.

"Commuting has gotten worse and worse over the years," Schlissfeld said. "If they can save three or four hours a day, it can make a big difference in the quality of their lives."

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Flexible work arrangements have one historic challenge: Employees are afraid they will suffer a career penalty for using them. Some firms are trying to debunk that idea by encouraging leaders on their teams to tap into the arrangements.

At Grassi & Co., Chief Human Resources Officer Jeff Agranoff makes it a point to tell his team when he's leaving early to coach his son's basketball team.

"We don't want our group to present to our team an image of a partner working 80 hours a week," he said. "They don't want to be that person someday."