Negotiating a reduced work schedule: What's the best approach?

**Question:** “I currently work full time, but I would like to reduce my schedule to 32 hours per week, working four, eight-hour days. (I am 65 years old.) I am able to complete my duties in this time frame, as I know what is needed and how to get it done in the shortest time. I have presented this proposal to my manager twice in less than six months, stating that I would be willing to "occasionally" work more hours or five days a week when needed. My manager has not responded. Do you have any suggestions or comments?” — Anonymous

Anonymous November 13, 2016 at 8:23 pm

I recently started getting my s.s. check at 63. I did this for the extra income because I don’t wish to spend my life at work doing extra shifts. I also requested to drop from 40 hours a week to 32. After couple of months they finally granted that request. Then out of the blue I got called in and told the only way I can keep 32 hour week is to change to night shift. AND they put me back on for 40 hours on days.32 hours is still considered full time and allows me to keep my insurance. How can they allow me to make those changes and then ‘re-nig and say it’s contingent to moving to night shift?.

Rob March 11, 2016 at 10:52 pm

I found this page in a search because I too am considering reducing my work week to 32 hours / 4 days. I have recently started working on a side project outside of work, which is now turning into a business venture. It's totally unrelated to what I do at work, and I enjoy doing it. The problem is that I don't have the time that I need to dedicate to it, and having that one extra day to focus on it would be a big help in growing it. I've been at my job for nearly 20 years and I'm 41 years old. Finding people with my skill set and experience would be difficult for my employer, so I'm wondering if I could leverage that if I were to propose my reduced schedule. I would also propose an equal reduction in pay by 20 percent. The problem though is that most salaried people in my department are working 50 to 60 hour weeks, and it's come to the point where it's almost expected that we should be working that many hours, but I make it a point not to do that. I feel like we give too much of our valuable time to our employers and not enough to ourselves and our families. I leave work after an 8 hour day, and I always feel like I'm sneaking out while the others continue to work well past 8 hours. So this could propose a challenge in proposing a reduction in hours. Or, I could just tell them I want to reduce my work schedule and pay, and give them the option to fire me if they don't like it. ;)

Rob March 11, 2016 at 10:57 pm

pose a challenge, not propose. I need to proof read things better before posting.
they can as long as your pay stays above the exempt minimum but you can’t work at all. the moment you do anything on that day, answer email, your entitled to full pay,

Kathy April 16, 2010 at 9:23 am

I currently work full-time as a salaried exempt employee. My company has gone to a reduced 4 days a week work schedule. Do they have the right not to pay me my full salaried exempt pay?

Walker May 15, 2009 at 9:59 am

you’re absolute correct, that idea would have to be presented to upper management.

Sherri January 25, 2009 at 1:38 pm

My Admin Asst job is 32 hrs and I work 5 days a week so I am available and so email doesn’t pile up. My benefits are pro-rated. Good luck!

Dee Miller January 23, 2009 at 3:55 pm

Elaine, here is how you approach this problem. You tell your supervisor that you would like to work 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM on Monday through Wednesday and on Thursday you work 7:00 AM to 4:00 PM and you are off on Friday. Those hours total 35 hours per week. Of course you could change up your hours as long as they total 35. Most employers are willing to work with you as long as your work gets done. Let me know how it goes for you.

Dee Miller January 23, 2009 at 3:43 pm

I work for a company that allows employees to work flex time. In my case, I work 45 hours one week and the next week I work 35 hours with Friday off. This works out well for me and I to am 65 years old. As long as our work schedule totals 80 hours for a two week period, our supervisors/managers do not have a problem with us working an alternative work schedule. Having one week where you only work 35 hours is better than not having a job at all so I would recommend that you present this option to your boss. They would probably be more agreeable to you working only one week of 35 hours than both weeks in any given pay period. Good luck but walk softly are you may not get the results you want.

Nancy January 23, 2009 at 3:43 pm
I think that your manager may already have given his or her answer by not answering at all, especially since you have presented the proposal twice. I work for a high level executive and know that sometimes when he doesn’t like a request asked of him, instead of being direct and saying “no”, he will just ignore it. That’s his way of avoiding an issue he doesn’t want to deal with, or feel the need to deal with.

Elaine January 23, 2009 at 3:33 pm

I’m in this predicament right now. Our company has announced that all salaried non exempt (office) employees will only work 35 hours per week effective February 9. I’ve been trying to think of reasons to offer for letting me work the 35 in four days, in effect, recouping part of what I’m losing by not having car expenses for the 5th day and washing/dry cleaning one day’s clothes, eating out for lunch. I hope some of you can help me think of something to offer them to make up for my not being there one day a week. I’m willing to do it any day they choose. I can schedule all doctor, eye, and dental appointments on that day off and not have to do it the four days I’m there. Any ideas?

Freda January 23, 2009 at 2:53 pm

I, too, reduced my hours, to 35 per week. Most companies still provide benefits for 30+ hours per week. I work 7 hours per day, which gives my Exec. peace of mind if something comes up. Additionally, he is saving 5 hrs per week for 52 weeks a year which is great for the budget. It’s a win-win for all.

Anon January 20, 2009 at 12:13 pm

Even if your company would be willing to adjust your schedule, are you willing to have a lower salary and perhaps no benefits? I wanted to work 32 hours with pro-rated benefits, but I could not make it happen, so I work full-time at age 65+ because I need full-time benefits for my retired husband and myself. And, if you are an at-will employee, your company can just let you go. Be careful what you ask for: you might get it.

Cheryl January 16, 2009 at 3:02 pm

Your boss may be waiting on responses from others in top management or HR, especially if a 32-hour-per-week schedule has never been done before. You may also want to inform your boss that you are open to a trial period of 3 months or less, during which time she could evaluate whether the new work schedule meets the company’s needs.

Jocelyn January 16, 2009 at 2:29 pm

Sometimes employees may disregard that there are to a certain extent tasks that occur on a daily basis, like sudden responsibility where if you are not there to handle it, who gets it? That is not fair. Or if you answer the phone, who answers it on Fridays. Also, if there are other people within your department and they work 5 days
per week and see you only working 4 and then having a long weekend, then decide to all request Friday off, what does the company say? Only certain people can and not you. Sometimes at my workplace it has been permitted but only when others or moral is not going to be affected. And when it is the company may want to say yes and that is why there is a delay to their response but in the best interest of the company and others they have to say no. The choice is theirs and you will have to stay or find a job with the hours you are looking for. I also disagree with approaching it with the whole court response because most companies are employee at will and you would just find yourself out of a job, if the job has been requiring you to work 5 then they have every right to keep saying it is required. Good Luck though, I don’t know what your role at that company encompasses and that makes it hard to give advise, but try to see both sides while you wait for an answer.

Rose January 16, 2009 at 2:06 pm

Have you talked this over with your HR department? The company I work for does not allow it. If you work less than 40 hours a week, you are considered part time (working less than 32 hours a week) with no benefits.

Mark January 16, 2009 at 1:57 pm

I would ask him or her for a private meeting, and then discuss the situation. Mention that you have proposed this twice, and would simply like a yes or a no. Even if it is a “no”, then you have closure and don’t have it hanging over your head.

One additional argument you can use, if you haven’t already, is that it will save the company money if they only have to pay someone for 32 hours work instead of 40 hours work. (Unless, of course, you were wanting the same total pay each week. I don’t know a single manager who would approve someone getting the same pay for 20% fewer hours worked.)

Another point is to ask if it can be tested on a 90-day trail basis. If your manager determines after the 90 days that it is not working out, then you would agree to go back to the normal schedule. This might be a good compromise, you are getting what you want, and he or she has the flexibility available to cancel it and say it is not working.

Krysti January 16, 2009 at 1:54 pm

I disagree. In this economy, an employer would probably love the idea of an employee being able to get the same amount of work done, in fewer hours. The employer would also be hard pressed in court in defending the replacement of a 65 year old employee because they were offering work solutions, not work problems. I think approaching it from this direction might help out.

BenThere January 16, 2009 at 1:44 pm

They’re probably just waiting for you to throw in the towel & RETIRE. In this economy, I would not rock the boat - if you keep bugging her about it she may decide to find someone who can maintain the same schedule you
have now. Even if you can get all your work done in 4 days, it isn’t all about YOU - it’s about supporting your boss, who would probably like you to BE THERE to field calls etc. on that 5th day. You might have better luck getting five shorter workdays than 4 longer ones.