



the importance of family-friendly workplaces

BY ANDRENA CLARK, DIRECTOR, EVENT RECRUITMENT

IN A TIME WHEN MANY FAMILIES see both parents working, it is imperative that companies adopt a policy of Family-Friendly Workplaces.

I'm sure you've all heard this phrase bantered around lately. It has become somewhat the buzz of 2004 but what does it all mean? Essentially, it recognises employees as members of families and social groups as well as members of a workforce. Family-friendly policies can serve a dual purpose of contributing to the needs of the company as well as meeting the needs of employees with family responsibilities. Benefits for employers that can come from having a family-friendly workplace include:

- Lower staff turnover
- Less absenteeism
- Increased efficiency
- Greater flexibility of staff, working hours and work arrangements
- Greater ability to attract staff
- Organisational culture that facilitates change and effective work performance
- A diverse workforce that reflects the customer base
- Improved staff satisfaction, loyalty and morale
- Improved corporate citizenship and public image
- Improved workplace equity

From the perspective of employees the benefits may include:

- An opportunity to better balance their working and family lives
- Greater equality of opportunity between men and women
- A fairer sharing of family responsibilities between men and women

The challenge in developing family-friendly policies relevant to the MICE industry is to find ways of developing approaches that reflect the reality of the workplace.

Identifying different options that have the potential to meet the many diverse needs of different employers and their employees is especially problematic. In order to be effective such options must meet the following objectives:

- Enhance the opportunity to reconcile work and family life
- Contribute to the effective and efficient operation of the company

There are many examples of family-friendly workplace policies and practices to choose from depending on the needs of

both employees and employers. The following are examples of family-friendly measures which companies may adopt. They include:

- Part-time work- where less than full-time hours are worked, with the benefit of continuity of employment and pro-rata accrual of benefits.
- Job Sharing- where one full-time job is shared between two employees, each working part-time on a permanent basis.
- Working from home - enables employees to spend part or all of their working time at home, on a temporary or permanent basis. Contact with the employer can be maintained via phone, e-mail, fax or regular face-to-face meetings in the workplace.
- Parental leave- may be given above the minimum award or legislative entitlement of standard parental leave. This may be unpaid leave for an extended period (greater than 12 months) or a period of paid leave.
- Pre-natal leave- to attend pre-natal medical appointments may be an additional leave entitlement or access to sick leave.
- Childcare provided by the employer- where an employer negotiates with a childcare operator to reserve places in a centre for an agreed contribution amount. Extended hours childcare and emergency care facilities may also be provided. Many companies are now also provided childcare within their building; this benefits the parent, child and employer.
- Bringing children to work in emergencies.
- Access to promotion, training and development- for those with family responsibilities and removing any obstacles to equal access, such as indirect discrimination.
- Time off in lieu arrangements- allows employees the option to take time off instead of being paid for the additional or overtime hours they have worked.

Increasingly, employers acknowledge the need for workers to balance work and family responsibilities and have introduced a range of the above mentioned provisions over the years to help families do this. The most frequently used arrangements are flexible hours and permanent part-time work.

For further information contact Andrena on (02) 9223 6277 or visit www.eventrecruitment.com.au