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Spotlight on... time for sale
Personnel Today 11 September 2006 17:24 This article first appeared in Personnel Today magazine. [Subscribe online](#) and save 20%.

With the Work and Families Bill encouraging employers to provide working patterns around the needs of staff, rather than vice versa, flexible working is becoming an increasingly hot topic.

Slivers of Time is a programme that allows people to register their skills and availability online to sell their free hours to employers - even as little as just a couple of hours a week.

What's it all about?

The initiative, which has received £500,000 funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, aims to help people who have fluctuating commitments, such as caring or studying. These people tend to find traditional methods of securing work, such as through temping agencies, more difficult.

By fitting around their lives, the programme aims to attract more committed and productive staff than the average temporary employee. It also aims to help cut the overheads associated with employing temps, such as the minimum four-hour booking fees often demanded by recruitment agencies.

So could this programme provide a cornerstone for flexible working? Slivers of Time's programme director, Wingham Rowan, who is heading the pilot at Newham Council, believes so. He says there is a massive demand for the initiative from workers - 212 'sellers' have already signed up.

The challenge is getting more employers interested.

"Groups of people, including lone parents, carers and those who are trying to study part-time, are very enthusiastic. It is more difficult getting employers to respond," he says.

Getting HR departments to embrace a new way of looking at recruitment is challenging," he says.

Pushing the boundaries

Rebecca Clake, organisation and resourcing adviser at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, says any programme that pushes the boundaries of flexible working should be supported. "Our research shows that when employers make use of flexible working they are not just meeting their employees' needs, it also benefits the business. Any initiative that helps employers offer more flexibility to staff and opens up a new labour market is welcome."

But Clake warns that the programme could cause headaches for HR. "It is challenging enough managing temporary staff who work full days and weeks, let alone those who just work a few hours. Managing staff and keeping them engaged with the company to ensure they are productive are likely to be some of the HR challenges thrown up by this programme. But I'm sure there are many employers and staff who could benefit," she says.

Rowan remains positive and is expecting a wave of early adopters over the next 18 months.

"In terms of Slivers of Time becoming a solid recruitment channel, I can't say when it will happen. But going on our progress so far, I truly believe this is just the start and that more people will be able to benefit from it in the future," he says.

Selling time... the benefits

- Quality of candidates: staff working when they want to are likely to be more productive.
- Wider talent pool: gives access to new candidates previously unable to work due to restricted working patterns.
- Cost savings: cuts out minimum agency charges if cover is needed for under four hours.
- Low overheads: by using the internet, you can see online who is available and at what cost without making endless phone calls.

Kristie Redford (About this Author)

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With the Work and Families Bill encouraging employers to provide working patterns around the needs of staff, rather than vice versa, flexible working is becoming an increasingly hot topic.

One initiative currently being piloted at Newham Council could be about to take the concept one step further.

'Slivers of Time' is a programme that allows people to register their skills and availability online to sell their free hours to employers - even as little as just a couple of hours a week.

What's it all about?

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COMMENTS

Slivers of Time Working

I run the Slivers-of-Time Working programme. Thought it might be helpful to respond to the comments by Rebecca Clake in this article suggesting that managing this kind of ultraflexible workforce could be a headache for HR.

Our experience operating the pilot market for this new way of working suggests the opposite. Imagine a self-selecting pool of people who have opted to work in a way that demands constant flexibility and systematically rewards reliability. They want a flow of short bookings in their area every week and know they need to be in favour with a range of employers to achieve that.

That's a different relationship for HR. The people you're booking for a couple of hours at precise points of need think of you more as clients of their personal business. They may only be cleaners, pick and packers or shop workers, but they are working around other commitments in their life and accelerating their skills/experience as they do so. They know they're only as good as their last booking. If they're useless you won't buy their hours again.

This is a challenge if you're focused on the command-and-control model of dealing with contingent labour in today's market. But there is a new dynamic emerging that might potentially solve some headaches for HR practitioners willing to look at new ways of engaging with the local workforce.

Wingham Rowan
25 Sep 2006