

How to talk to your boss about hybrid working

Many of us have been working at home during the pandemic, and you might be hoping for those flexible working options to become permanent.

However, it's possible your manager might be keen for you to return back to the office full-time. Over half (55%) of employees say their organisation is offering hybrid working arrangements, research for SEEK shows. But over a third (39%) say their employer hasn't offered any support to transition into hybrid working.

If you're wanting to split your working week between the office and home, here's how to begin the conversation with your manager.

Hybrid working can work for businesses too

"Keep in mind that flexibility and hybrid working should matter to employers, too", says Chris Regan, chief people officer at [Whispir](#), a technology company specialising in communication software. "Flexibility isn't just a nice-to-have, it's a must-have" she says. As more companies adopt it, there is a risk to the employer brand for the companies that don't.

Productivity has increased, too

At Whispir, there's been an increase in productivity since remote working began, Regan says. "We've seen that generally, people work harder when they're working from home.

"We have had an increase in productivity and a decrease in work-life balance. The hours they might have spent commuting are generally now spent online," Regan says.

That's backed by SEEK research, which found that 32% of employees say their workload has increased since working from home, and 25% of managers believe their teams have been more productive.

But plenty of workers have missed the social connection and the buffer between work and home life, Regan says. "Many miss having the disconnect between work and home they had when they commuted."

Sally Elson, Head of People Advisory and Talent at MYOB, agrees. "The face-to-face and spontaneous interactions are gone and they play a significant role in who you are as a team and, for many of us, are important contributors to why we love our work." This is where the combination of home and office work – or hybrid work – fits in.

How to plan your pitch

Before you have a conversation with your manager about hybrid working, be clear about what you're asking for. Make sure you emphasise how it won't negatively impact the business but will be a positive step. Make it easy for your manager to say "yes".

Here are some steps to take:

- **Think about your role and be realistic:** First, be clear on whether your role can be performed remotely. Keep in mind that some roles – such as an office co-ordinator or reception role – sometimes can't be performed effectively if they're entirely remote. "Think about whether the effectiveness of your role involves being in the office. And if it is, be realistic about that request," says Regan.
- **Highlight the benefits:** Explain the benefits of working remotely, and how you might overcome any obstacles you've already identified (if there are any).
- **Outline the structure of your days:** "Be clear about which days you would like to work remotely", Elson says. Explain how your days at home will be structured in a practical sense, and whether every week will have the same structure.
- **Explain how you'll be contactable:** Reassure your boss that you'll be responsive via phone, email or through your organisation's messaging system.

"Everyone needs to be on the same page about reasonable contactability and responsiveness," says Elson. It's important the whole team and key stakeholders understand how to contact each other so there aren't impacts to deliverables.

- **Suggest a trial period:** If your manager is unsure about hybrid working, suggest a trial period. "If it's a new arrangement and they're generally not comfortable with people working from home, a trial is great for both parties because you can see how it's working and review it," Regan says.

Questions your manager might ask

Here are some common concerns that managers might have around your hybrid working request, and how to respond to them.

- **Your manager believes you'll be less productive at home:** Explain how you've maintained the same productivity during the pandemic, and give examples of specific tasks. There are plenty of ways for your manager to monitor output, such as daily phone calls or messages, check-ins throughout the week, or weekly video meetings.

Reassure your manager that you'll be available for new work or regular updates throughout the week, just as you are in the office.

- **Your manager thinks you'll be distracted at home:** Employees are generally more productive at home because there are fewer distractions (with the exception of home schooling and childcare requirements), says Regan. "There are fewer incidental interruptions at home, with limited time for social chats and more focus time in general." It can help to point this out to your manager.
- **Your manager is concerned about the impact on team culture:** The research shows that just over half (52%) of managers are concerned about their team's culture as a result of hybrid working.. Technology offers plenty of opportunities to connect with your team. "You could even suggest ideas for weekly team activities such as Zoom lunch meetings, team trivia or end-of-week drinks," Regan says. You could also suggest to your manager that they have a dedicated day in the office where all staff come in.
- **Your manager prefers face-to-face team meetings:** You could offer to work in the office on the same days as key stakeholders or when team meetings are scheduled, to prioritise face-to-face connections, Elson says. Flexibility with your work-from-home days may help overcome this challenge.

Working from home suits some of us really well, and if you're keen to continue or move towards hybrid working, talking to your manager is the first step. Take the time to think about exactly what you want, and how it will work in a practical sense so your boss is confident it will work.

Source: Independent research conducted by Nature of behalf of SEEK, interviewing 4000 Kiwis annually. Published February 2022.