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Family Friendly Employment

Case Study: Green Element

Green Element is an environmental management consultancy that advises organisations on how to develop their relationship with their environment. Their clients include accountancy firm Grant Thornton and advertising agency adam&eveDDB.

This small company has five staff members and does not have a fixed office location – staff work from client sites or from home. Two of the staff members are single parents and one will shortly become a father.

Green Element considers themselves a very family friendly business, with flexible working a key part of their business model. Staff can and can complete their hours when they choose as long as business needs are met. This enables employees to arrange childcare, but also be flexible as their circumstances change. Staff are assessed based on the work they produce, rather than the hours worked. All staff (whether they have caring responsibilities or not) have the same access to flexible working, so their work-life balance is supported.

Managing Director Will Richardson, considers being a family friendly business vital because **“it’s the right thing to do. You’ve got to make it work for the people working for you – they are the business.”** He does not enforce fixed working hours because **“when you are running a business you want good quality and high standard work. How you get to that end goal – does it matter?”**

Technology has helped enormously with the flexibility Green Element can offer – all staff work together online on Skype once a month to keep the team communicating, and also hire office space to work together regularly.

Being family friendly is balanced against business needs and pragmatism is key. For example, as the business secures more international work, any staff filling job roles created will need to commit to travelling. Family and work life does sometimes clash, but there has only been one occasion in three years when illness of a child meant a staff member missed a vital meeting – the business coped and the client understood.

Work is shaped around family circumstances: for example two staff members were needed to run a training session in Sheffield. One stayed overnight, so could start the session at 9am, with the second joining at 11am once she had completed the school run and travelled. This worked well for the client, and meant both work and personal commitments could be met.

Stability is considered key. Turnover is low, and staff will be given six months’ notice if the business ever needed to downsize.

As a small business, one of the barriers to implementing more policies is finance. However, additional policies are being considered as the business (and profit margins) grow such as enhanced parental leave. Statutory responsibilities are met by using resources such as the ARAG legal directory which includes guidance and templates. Will believes the key to developing new policies is to talk to people about this agenda, and sharing knowledge.

For more information, visit:
www.greenelement.co.uk



PREPARED BY:



ON BEHALF OF:



City of Westminster