

**John Quek** provides the ropes to securing a part-time position.

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## **Introduction**

Under the Employment Act, a 'part-time employee' is one who is required, under **his** contract of services with an employer, to work less than 30 hours a week. The wages are set by market forces and should be **determined** by mutual agreement between the employee **and** employer.

## **Rationale for Part-time Work**

Flexible work schedules, telecommuting and an increased reliance on part-time work are all becoming more popular alternatives to the traditional nine-to-five working day. Over the years, a growing number of women as well as men are pushing for part-time work due to a spectrum of reasons. This trend is fuelled by the fact that some workers are tired of the stress and long working hours and are now opting for shorter working hours to better balance their lifestyle demands.

Part-time options are often appealing to employees at either end of the career spectrum. For young working adults, the need for part-time work can arise from child/eldercare responsibilities, studies or simply the need for more personal time to socialize. In addition, flexible working hours can be used as a means for the mature workers to negotiate part-time employment as a transition into retirement. As a result, some companies offer part-time employment as a tool to attract and retain both younger and senior workers.

Finding a well-compensated part-time job that matches the skills set of an employee to the business needs is indeed a challenge. Aside from the service industry and home-based jobs, part-time positions are rarely advertised and often exist only because they have been customized to meet a particular individual's needs within an organization. How is it possible then to create a part-time position that matches an employee's needs with his/her expertise and working experience?

## **Presenting a Business Case to Management**

To request for part-time work, it is important for the worker to demonstrate what he/she has to offer to the company. If a worker is valued and accomplished enough in their career, they will have greater bargaining power to negotiate a new working arrangement. With a good track record, employers would rather have the staff stay and work part-time rather than leave. In addition, there is a need to demonstrate to management that part-time work will not affect the quality of work, workplace productivity and customer/supplier relations. The number of working hours should not be the only measure of productivity. The part-timers' quality of work should be

similar to that of the full-time employees and the evaluation of his/her performance should be measured against the standards used for all employees.

### **Job Redesign for Part-time Work**

To some workers, working part-time may be misinterpreted as “downgrading” to a job that has lower responsibilities or a reduced workload. Nevertheless, there are always alternative measures to counter these issues through job redesign. For example, if an existing task cannot be done in less than five days a week, job sharing may be introduced as a solution to this problem. Under this scenario, another staff may be hired to cover the same job duties so that the working hours per se can be reduced. On hindsight, a lot of part-time jobs are only artificially part-time since some workers may end up spending their time checking their e-mails and answering phone calls while away from the office. However with job sharing, there is always someone in the office to cover their duties when they are not around.

### **Seeking Part-time Positions**

For a start, the F&B sector, home-based sales positions, insurance and property companies are just some of the more common industries where one can find a part-time position. To find part-time work in other industries, one may try focusing on smaller companies, including start-ups. There are many growing, small to medium-sized companies that are little more entrepreneurial and are often more flexible and more receptive to alternative work arrangements. Smaller companies expecting growth by next year may be happy to bring on someone part-time now, so that when business picks up they won't have to scramble to hire and train new employees.

For those who wish to work in larger organizations, networking may be a key to secure such positions. Ask around your friends, business associates or ex-colleagues if such positions exist and try to “sell” yourself well. Lastly, business reports, employee handbooks and other sources of publications can provide hints whether a particular organization is receptive to flexible work arrangements. Such organizations are often termed as family-friendly companies that address the Work-life needs of their staffs by providing flexible work schedules.

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