

## Leading retailers know that part-timers are central to their business.

8

Employers value part-time employees as a means of organising labour over the peaks and troughs of the workday and workweek trade. And many people – particularly workers with family responsibilities – appreciate the opportunity to work less than full-time hours.

However the nature of work, and the make-up and expectations of part-time staff has changed. They are no longer a ‘stop gap’ measure; they are more often than not an integral part of the business.

Part-time workers need to be taken seriously, many want a career, and many will shop around to find a good employer.

During our research, a few employers expressed the view that full-time workers were more desirable and more valuable because they had ‘a greater commitment to the job’ and/or were perceived as being more responsible or reliable.

This may be true in some cases, but the important question is ‘why?’. It could be the case that it is not part-time workers that are less committed to their jobs, but that it is the nature of some part-time jobs that engenders less commitment and enthusiasm from workers.

Good jobs, whether part-time or full-time, attract good people.

## Australian story

An Australian department store undertook extensive market research to ascertain the nature of their customers; the key 'wants' of their customers; and trading patterns (including shopping preferences). Their research showed that their customers:

- were primarily in the middle to upper income range and that many of them held tertiary qualifications
- were most concerned with (in order of priority) speed of purchases, staff service, and pricing, and
- did most of their shopping at the end of the week.

Prior to their work reorganisation, this retailer had addressed the increased demand at the end of the week with casual staff. However, while effective in minimising direct costs, this did not adequately service their other business objectives of quality customer service. The higher spending customers expected and sought detailed product knowledge from staff, which casual staff often could not provide.

The retailer responded in two ways:

- it introduced a two-week roster which successfully shifted some of the more experienced full-time staff to the peak trading times, and
- it embarked on a process of reducing its casual workforce in favour of regular part-timers.

***Good employers recognise the value of part-time employees, and make an effort to find out the needs and expectations of this important sector of their workforce.***

## Achieving roster flexibility

The type of flexibility your company needs depends on your business. For some retailers the key consideration is the fluctuation of business over the course of the day or week. For others, the main fluctuation is seasonal. For many, it's both.

While it may be perfectly sensible to address short-term seasonal needs by using casual staff, you have a number of choices in how to manage staffing for your more predictable daily and weekly peaks and troughs.

Don't forget your full-timers either. Rosters, overtime, time off in lieu, timebanks and leave arrangements can be used creatively to ensure you maximise and minimise your staff coverage at essential times of the day, week and year.

## Careers: part-timers want them too.

It's important not to assume that men are looking for full-time work and women are looking for part-time work. However, many women and some men do prefer part-time work, or may have no option but to work part-time due to conflicting personal responsibilities.

Many part-time staff would like to advance further in their jobs but, with 94 per cent of retailers surveyed reporting that 10 per cent or less of their store

managers jobs are held by part-timers, career opportunities appear to be limited for part-time employees.

## Benchmarking data

Our survey found:

- 88 per cent of Australian retailers offer permanent employment to high performing casuals.

In an employee survey of an Australian retailer (Derby and Mahony, 1994):

- 35 per cent of part-timers were the primary income earner
- 90 per cent of full-timers (71% of whom were women) wished to maintain their full-time hours
- 80 per cent of part-timers (91% of whom were women) preferred part-time to full-time work, and
- 80 per cent of part-timers did not want their hours reduced, and 41 per cent would have preferred more hours.

## International comparisons

In Europe, the 1994 Labour Market Survey found that, on average, in the 12 European member states:

- 31 per cent of part-timers would prefer full-time work, and
- 12 per cent of full-timers would prefer part-time work.

The same survey found that the majority of re-entrants to the workforce (predominantly women returning from maternity leave) would prefer part-time work (Evan and Lippoldt 2001).

A British study found that 53 per cent of part-timers wanted to be considered for promotion within their part-time jobs (Brockbank and Traves 1995).

“A large proportion of our workers are part-time. We want to promote from within – that’s where the skills and knowledge are. We’ve had to come up with some options, we’ve had to change our culture – we don’t want to lose those staff.”

*Senior Executive, Major USA Retailer*

"Employees working short hours (about four hours in a shift) tend to have higher levels of productivity because individual output tends to fall towards the end of a shift" (Perrons, 1999).

## Part-time work – the regulations:

In the federal jurisdiction there are no limitations placed on the number of hours worked by regular part-timers. Regular part-timers can work any reasonable configuration of hours over the week.

If you operate under a State award you will need to check its requirements. You may also set out part-time hours requirements in your certified agreement.

For information contact the ARA or:

Wageline phone advice service (local call):

New South Wales	1300 363 264
Victoria	1300 363 264
ACT	1300 363 264
Northern Territory	1300 363 264
Queensland	1300 369 945
Western Australia	1300 655 266
South Australia	1300 365 255
Tasmania (State Awards)	1300 366 322
Tasmania (federal awards)	1300 363 264

## Australian stories

“ We offer permanent part-time positions and we expect, and get, commitment in return. ”

*Senior Executive, Lone Star Steakhouse and Saloon*

“ We introduced permanent part-time work to attract people to us – people who want more stable employment, people who are paying off mortgages. ”

*Senior Manager, Suzanne Grae*

“ Managers work with part-timers to ensure that hours fit in with family responsibilities. Bevilles can provide working mothers with hours to suit – especially at weekends and during school hours. ”

*Store Manager, Bevilles*

## 24 hours 7 days a week

In many companies there seems to be an unwritten policy that progression to management is contingent upon a willingness for staff to work long hours. Particularly at the store level, there is a strong sentiment that ‘managers have to be there all the time’. With shops open up to 24 hours a day, every day, it is clear that any one manager cannot be there all the time.

New models of management are being introduced to the retail sector. It is being increasingly recognised that part-time management is possible and desirable.