

Four-Day Workweek



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If you give credence to various publications, it appears the world is on the cusp of another revolutionary change as the four-day workweek gains traction worldwide. Could a four-day week become the next century's standard?

While most of the four-day workweek adoption has been outside Canada, recently, municipalities and companies have started to test it.

Two models of the four-day workweek have risen to the top in terms of popularity:

Scenario 1

- Four days of work (typically Monday to Thursday)
- 32 hours of work per week (standard 8-hour days)
- No change in pay or benefits

Scenario 2

- Four days of work (typically Monday to Thursday)
- 40 hours of work per week (longer 10-hour days)
- No change in pay or benefits

Irrespective of the scenario you see possible merit in, it is essential to understand some of the potential Pros and Cons of a four-day workweek before entering into a test for your law firm.

Pros

- Better productivity (studies see peak productivity between 25 - 30 hours for workers over 40 years old)
- More efficient use of time (less time spent in inefficient meetings)
- Staff satisfaction/retention (more outstanding work-life balance - less stress - happier)
- Staff recruiting (this approach will appeal to staff who are not in a hybrid situation and even those that are)
- Team building (higher emphasis on efficiency tends to lead to team building)
- Fewer overhead costs (reduces wear/tear on office including lower electricity usage)
- More productivity innovations (because of the greater emphasis on time-saving, staff are more likely to focus on innovations)
- Environmental benefits (reduces carbon footprint)

Cons

- Risk of increased cost (if staff fail to achieve workload, it may result in extra staffing)
- Government employee benefit plans (many of the benefits available are calculated on the number of hours worked, and 40 hours is currently considered the “standard work week”)
- Scheduling of client/lawyer coverage/service (will require a greater focus on initial scheduling and monitoring follow-up)
- Health impact (extended hours in a day may affect health)

Possible Suggestions for Law Firms

- It has to be tested for a meaningful time frame so you can measure the results (suggest a test period of one year).
- Offer two options Monday to Thursday or Tuesday to Friday.
- I would suggest 9-hour days and seek staff input to increase the probability of it being embraced.
- Canvass the lawyers to make sure the resulting coverage works for them, recognizing there will be exceptions.
- Create a “special team” that is agreeable to come in whenever overage coverage is required.

Conclusion

It is worth a try – it puts you out front of most firms and is likely to have an immediate positive reaction from current and potential staff. From everything I have read, it is not if but when. Most “first to adopt” results in a positive competitive advantage for an actual length of time.

Stephen Mabey is a CPA, CA and the Managing Director of Applied Strategies, Inc. Stephen's focus is on law firms in general and on small to medium size law firms in particular. He has written about and advised on, a wide range of issues including - leadership, business development, marketing, key performance indicators, strategic planning, mergers, practice acquisitions, competitive intelligence, finance, mergers, practice transitioning, compensation, organizational structures, succession and transition planning, partnership arrangements and firm retreats. In 2013, Stephen was inducted as a Fellow of the College of Law Practice Management in recognition of his sustained commitment to the highest standards of professionalism in law practice management. For more information, visit appliedstrategies.ca or connect with [Stephen Mabey on LinkedIn](#).

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