Expert Employee Scheduling: A Blueprint for Success

WorkforceHub

INTRODUCTION

1.   The Benefits of Effective Employee Scheduling

This eBook is for manufacturers who want to take a strategic approach to employee scheduling. Let's dive in.

What are the main benefits of effective employee scheduling?
- Ensures you meet production deadlines
- Maximizes your labor budget
- Maintains high employee satisfaction and loyalty
- Complies with all applicable labor laws

First, we'll discuss best practices for creating employee schedules.

2.   How To Do Employee Scheduling Like a Pro

Schedule building is a skill. You can become better at it. Here are 7 tips to improve your schedule-building prowess.

A. Use Scheduling Software for Employee Scheduling
It doesn't matter what type of manufacturing business you have—you need the right tool for the job. Scheduling software helps you make efficient schedules. And you can do it quickly with built-in templates. Customizable scheduling rules prevent coverage gaps or overstaffing.

Employee profiles guide your scheduling. The system alerts you to scheduling conflicts. It will ensure that you have employees with the necessary qualifications for each shift. Good scheduling software allows one manager to create schedules for many facilities, teams, or projects.

B. Create Schedules Several Weeks (or Months) in Advance
Unless you are a start-up, you understand the staffing needs of your company. They may vary with the season and production demands. Some employers argue that 'just-in-time' scheduling is more efficient. They require employees to be on call in case they are needed at the last minute. This practice does more harm than good. Employers who require on-call shifts end up with frustrated employees.

Unpredictable schedules are responsible for high employee turnover in the manufacturing industry. Create schedules as far in advance as possible. Make sure your employees understand that there may be last-minute changes. Most employees, however, won't be affected. Studies have shown that there is far less schedule unpredictability than business

owners realize. Employee scheduling software allows you to make standard schedules and copy forward. You can adjust them as needed, but you will find that they are fairly stable.

C. Understand Your Employees' Needs and Wants

Ideally, this should begin with the first interview. Find out when an employee is available and how many hours they want to work. Availability and shift preferences should be important factors in the hiring decisions. Unless there is a severe labor shortage in your area, you should be able to hire people who want a variety of schedules.

Take some time to put the shift preferences puzzle pieces together. As mentioned previously, use the employee profiles tool in your scheduling software. Enter every piece of information about each employee—even if you don't think it's necessary. Update as needed. You only need to enter this information one time but you will reap the benefits every time you build a schedule.

D. Think Outside the Box

Don't assume that 'because it's always been done this way' is an excuse for failing to innovate. If you've never experimented with creative scheduling it's probably because you use spreadsheets. Some full-time employees might prefer working four 10-hour shifts during the week. Line those up with your busiest days and the employees will have two extra hours to catch up on days they really need it.

E. Simplify Shift Trading With an Online Trade Board

Many managers are afraid of loosening up shift trading policies. They worry about short-handed shifts. They worry about miscommunication leading to no-shows. They worry about the balance of new and experienced employees on a shift.

Employee scheduling software with an online trade board has been a boon to many manufacturers. If you set shift rules in your employee scheduling software, it will prevent the problems mentioned previously.

Employees are able to post a shift on the board when they have an unexpected conflict. Employees who want more hours can snap up more shifts. Schedule control is a valuable perk. Employees stay with companies that support their work/life balance.

F. Create an Absence Management Plan

An absence management plan is a set of policies that manage time off. It addresses planned time off like vacations and family leave. It also addresses unplanned absences like sick time. When employees and administrators follow the proper protocols, there is less impact on productivity and workflows.

Employee scheduling software analytics help managers identify chronic absences. The manager can then work with the employee(s) to address the problem.

Develop a career progression program. Manufacturers who don't provide career paths don't keep their best employees. The entry-level team members will be eager to expand their job skills and your staff will be better able to respond to changing production demands on the fly.

3. Flexible Schedules: An Employee Perk That Helps Small Businesses Compete

Small manufacturers who don't offer flexible schedules probably don't realize why they are so important. Of course, employees want more freedom. But there are also significant advantages for owners. In fact, employer benefits may outweigh those for the staff.

A key advantage is helping small businesses compete with larger companies. Here are some of the ways flexible schedules make small businesses more competitive:

- Lower overhead helps businesses run leaner
- Reduces absenteeism
- Expands the hiring pool to include people who need schedule flexibility
- Engaged employees drive business growth
- A supportive work environment helps retain experienced employees

Technology has enabled this type of employment. And technology is essential for companies that want to offer alternative working arrangements.

With employee scheduling software, any type of manufacturer can offer non-traditional work schedules. It doesn't have to cost more. It may even reduce labor expenses or keep them stable as a company grows.

Self-Service Employee Scheduling

Employees choose their schedules subject to company policies. There may be core times they are required to work or a minimum number of hours expected.

Many people would accept a lower paying job if they could choose their own hours. They could end up with more money in the long run. It might allow a part-timer to take on another part-time job. It can help parents stagger their hours to reduce or eliminate the cost of daycare.

Fixed Rotating Shifts

This type of scheduling is fairly common in manufacturing. Employees have a mix of shifts. This could include, days, evenings, and swing shifts. It could also mean alternating days worked on a predictable basis. Companies who spread the less-desirable shifts among employees tend to have a happier workforce.

Compressed Work Week

Someone who works 'four tens' has a compressed work week. Four 10-hour shifts squeeze a 40-hour work week into four days. Employees appreciate a three-day weekend every single week!

Job Sharing

A job share arrangement is where two (or more) people perform a job traditionally held by one employee. Job sharing is not as common as other types of alternative scheduling. However, it is used successfully in the public and private sector.

4. A Beginner's Guide to Schedule Forecasting

Let's take manufacturing scheduling to another level. Small businesses can use data like organizations with large data analysis departments.

Here's how to do it:

A. Choose Your Schedule Forecasting System

Before you can use analytics, you need to choose a schedule forecasting system. The most important tool is the schedule builder. If it's not intuitive and user-friendly, move on. The goal is to match best-fit employees to shifts in a systematic way.

Schedule templates let you drag and drop employees into shifts. The software should offer multiple overviews such as day, week, and month. Duplicate schedules and copy them forward with a couple clicks. Compare schedules for several teams or locations at once.

Employee profiles let you enter detailed information. This includes skills, training, availability, and license expiration dates.

B. Customize Your Schedule Forecasting System

When you have chosen your software, now it's time to customize it. Don't neglect this step. It is critical. Take the time you need to enter every bit of information possible. This includes staffing needs per shift, production hours, and employee availability. Plus certification requirements and job codes for client or project billing.

Compliance settings protect you from labor violations. Enter rules for Predictive Scheduling, overtime, meals and breaks, and union contracts.

Don't worry about getting everything perfect the first time. You can change your settings as often as you need to.

C. Enter Key Performance Indicators

Now you enter business metrics. It may be production data, demand estimates, or cost of goods sold. System integration expands forecasting capability and ease of customization.

D. Forecast Staffing Needs

Now the labor forecasting magic happens. The software compiles a goldmine of workforce data. It applies algorithms based on your KPIs to determine precise staffing demands. It shows how to increase profitability by modifying labor variables. This could be shift length, team makeup, or project assignments.

Determine which shifts need more workers. Monitor seasonal staffing trends contrasted with revenue, operating costs, or the number of clients. You will know whether to hire more employees or give current part-time employees more hours.

Powerful Labor Forecasting Software is Now Affordable

Sophisticated labor forecasting software is now affordable for small businesses. Data-driven scheduling provides a competitive edge. Optimization increases profitability and helps your business expand and diversify. It improves operational efficiency and eliminates waste. It helps your teams work smarter instead of harder.

Labor forecasting has benefits for established businesses as well as start-ups. With modern schedule software, you don't need a data analyst degree to forecast labor needs.

What Could Advanced Labor Force Planning Mean For Your Business?

A recreational product manufacturer used labor forecasting to grow from eight employees to more than 70 in less than a year. During this explosive growth, the company didn't need to expand their admin staff. They also appreciated the reduction in paycheck errors. And the seamless integration with their payroll system.

Give Your Supervisors Smart Tools for Proactive Management

Powerful scheduling tools ease the administrative burden on managers. It lets them schedule employees proactively instead of reactively. They can focus on productivity and employee engagement instead of the mechanics of creating schedules.

5. 12 Signs Your Employee Scheduling is Broken

Is your employee scheduling broken? Here are 12 red flags that may indicate that your employee scheduling is causing problems in your organization.

1. Your Scheduling Strategy Hasn't Changed In Years

If your managers are using the same strategies they used ten years ago, there is probably room for improvement. Business operations have probably changed dramatically in that time. You have no doubt adopted technology that has impacted processes. You have probably introduced new products or services. You may have expanded your business to multiple locations. These types of changes impact staffing needs.

2. Your Employees Are Frustrated

If your employees are frustrated, find out if it has to do with shift schedules. Inflexible scheduling is hard on employees. So is variable scheduling. Employees also hate it when schedules aren't posted in advance. With these practices, they can't balance their work and personal responsibilities. Schedule confusion also causes problems. If they can't see their schedule from their phone, you are failing to take advantage of inexpensive cloud-based time and attendance software.

3. You Have Shift Coverage Gaps

Frequent short-staffing may seem an obvious result of poor scheduling—but many managers blame it on other factors. Short staffing has many ripple effects. It should be avoided at all costs. With spreadsheet scheduling, it's difficult to get a handle on this problem.

4. You Have a Lack of Employee Involvement

If your employees aren't involved in scheduling to some degree, your managers are working too hard. Allowing employees to relieve some of the scheduling burden is easy with employee scheduling software.

5. You Have Increasing Absenteeism

If your absenteeism has been trending upward, you need to figure out why. Talk to your employees and managers. Better scheduling could turn this problem around before it does any more damage.

6. You Have High Employee Turnover

The unemployment rate has increased for some businesses affected by the lockdown. For essential manufacturers, the lack of qualified workers is a serious problem.

Some manufacturers are hiring ex-convicts and even current prisoners who qualify for work-release programs. Workers with limited English skills are landing jobs previously unattainable.

Employee scheduling can have a significant impact on turnover. If you have part-time, hourly employees, it's more important than ever to accommodate your employees' schedule preferences as much as possible.

7. You Have Difficulty Filling Open Positions

Word gets around. Especially in smaller communities. If your company is known for bad employee scheduling practices, you will only attract the most desperate candidates. Employees care about wage levels, health benefits, and work/life balance.

After health insurance, a flexible schedule is the most-valued benefit for employees. Some employers have distinguished themselves by offering more vacation time or other scheduling perks. When trying to compete with a shrinking pool of candidates, you can only raise wages so much and remain profitable. You can, however, offer more attractive schedules. Employee scheduling software can make employee-friendly scheduling easy. If you want to improve your hiring, improve your scheduling.

8. Excessive Unplanned Overtime

Planned overtime can save money if managed wisely. We're talking about unexpected overtime. If you frequently ask employees to stay after their shift ends, you aren't forecasting staffing requirements.

9. You Frequently Hire Last-Minute Temps

As with overtime, the use of temp workers can save on labor costs. But when they are used at the last minute as a stop-gap measure, it points to poor employee scheduling.

10. You Miss Production Deadlines

If you can't trace it to a non-employee issue (such as a materials shortage), frequently missed deadlines could be due to understaffed shifts.

11. You Have Decreasing Productivity

If your productivity is trending downward, look at your scheduling.

12. You Don't Use Employee Scheduling Analytics

If you don't have a way to look at scheduling effects over time, you are at a serious disadvantage. The importance of workforce management analytics can't be overstated.

6. How Does Employee Scheduling Software Work?

Running a business and managing staff members is no small task and it can become challenging to make sure that your company is running smoothly 24/7.

Employee scheduling software simplifies an essential task—scheduling employees for shifts.

How does it work?

First, you enter your employees in the system. Create a profile for each employee.

Your scheduling software should sync with your time and attendance system. This allows you to take advantage of all of the features.

In your employee profile, include:
- Contact information
- Shift availability
- Shift preferences
- Maximum hours
- Full- or part-time status
- Job role
- Certifications
- Team or department

Schedule Rules Rule

The rules you enter into your scheduling software will depend on your industry, business size, and employee demographics.
Let's look at possible scheduling rules:
1. Maximum and minimum shift lengths
2. Number of employees per shift
3. Scheduled and unscheduled employee absences
4. Multiple locations
5. FLSA and OSHA requirements
6. Predictive scheduling laws

Create shift rules. For example, how many employees do you need? What certifications are required for every shift? Do you have employees that work multiple locations? Set alerts so you can't double book employees.

Start Scheduling

You start with a calendar. This is where you will create your schedule(s). Graphical interfaces color code employees, shifts, production lines and locations. Super easy.

- Create schedule templates with high-level detail
- Drag and drop employees into shifts where you want them
- Copy schedules forward from week to week
- View multiple schedules at once
- Compare schedules by location, team, job site, or project phase

What Are The Advantages of Employee Scheduling Software?

Here are 9 advantages of using employee scheduling software:

1. Predict staffing needs through intuitive intelligence. Historical data rolls into forecasting trends.
2. Avoid understaffing through employee skills and education based scheduling. This ensures you have the right employees filling the right positions based on training, education, certification or skill level.
3. Avoid overstaffing through alerts that inform you when employees have been scheduled for overtime.
4. Alerts notify you when employees have reached their FMLA reduced schedule hours, are scheduled for days they need off, or have other restrictions.
5. Automatic suggestions provide alternatives for specific shifts so that you can quickly see who can fill in when an employee calls in or requests a specific day off.
6. Mobile notification allows you to see when employees request PTO, request specific shifts or have an emergency.
7. Electronic delivery of schedules means that employees receive their schedules early and helps you stay compliant with local scheduling laws and regulations.
8. Employee portal access allows employees to look at schedules from home, request time off when they are thinking about it (and not a week later when they urgently remember), and submit feedback around extra shifts and other schedule requests.
9. Missed shift alerts notify employees who have failed to clock in, allowing managers to more quickly address the issue.

7. What Small Business Owners Need to Know About Predictive Scheduling Laws

Predictive employee scheduling regulations are part of a larger employee rights trend aimed at improving the work/life balance for hourly and part-time workers.

Businesses with fluctuating staffing demands often use 'just-in-time' employee scheduling. The instability wreaks havoc on the lives of the lowest paid employees in the workforce. These are the people most likely to be living paycheck to paycheck while juggling two or more part-time jobs.

Many argue that the practices are unethical and prohibit upward mobility for the least advantaged.

Predictive scheduling laws are known by several different names including fair workweek, secure scheduling, and advance scheduling. Let's look at the employee scheduling methods in question.

Employee Scheduling Practices Targeted
- Posting schedules with little or no advance notice
- On-call shifts
- Changing posted schedules with little or no advance notice
- Canceling shifts at the last minute
- Sending employees home before they have worked their full shift
- Failing to give new hires a good faith estimate of the number of hours they will be able to work
- Bringing employees in from other locations to fill shifts instead of giving the hours to existing employees
- Hiring new employees instead of giving more hours to part-time workers who want additional hours
- Scheduling workers for "clopening" shifts. This is when an employee must close an establishment and then come back to re-open it within a short time frame
- Providing little or no rest between shifts
- Failing to reasonably accommodate employees' requests for flexible schedules
- Retaliating against employees who make schedule requests, refuse to work shifts added at the last minute or decline to cover for an employee who calls in sick

Challenges of Predictive Scheduling
- Scheduling managers have to forecast staffing demands in advance
- Unexpected changes in staffing requirements may cost the employer in predictability pay
- Employers who want to limit the number of full-timers on their staff may be forced to push part-timers into full-time status
- Employee scheduling changes can affect their Affordable Care Act 'large employer' status

In Conclusion

Swipeclock has several employee scheduling solutions. WorkforceHub, our Human Resources Management System (HRMS) includes Workforce Scheduling, a full-featured solution that can handle complicated team schedules, multiple locations and sophisticated forecasting. For more information about manufacturing scheduling, visit Swipeclock for manufacturing.