

DOUBLE TROUBLE

From the pros and cons of job sharing to sorting out turf wars, Stewart Forsyth explains how best to harness the power of two.



SHARE AND SHARE ABOUT
We have a couple of employees who are interested in job sharing. We've never tried this before and I'm unsure if it's something that we should pursue. What are the pros and cons?

The major advantage of job sharing in a tight job market is having more people who want to do the job. Turning full-time jobs to part-time significantly expands the candidate pool—which explains the considerable growth in New Zealand's part-time jobs.

Other advantages are:

- It sounds like you have two people who already know the job and your business—that should increase your confidence that they will deliver results.
- By having two people do the one job you have the potential for different perspectives on issues, more creative approaches, and potentially a bit of positive competition.
- It may be possible for you to do some creative scheduling, having them both available when things are busy or having one start early and the other finish late to cover those times.

The disadvantages are:

- Their boss will need to communicate with two people instead of one—from work allocation and management through to performance reviews—so she could see this as a down-side. If she establishes a regular meeting with both of them (combined with

the ongoing team meeting?) she could cut down on repeating herself (at least on the task front, not on the review side) and get the benefits of a shared understanding.

- They will need to communicate with each other—particularly for task handovers—so that things don't stop when one of them goes off for the day. That means potentially spending more time talking rather than doing. But establishing routines of constructive communication will ensure that they don't have hassles about sharing filing systems and office space.
- They need to understand that this move will slow down their careers. They will produce less of what the organisation values, and have lower visibility. It's important to ensure that they still have a career track and access to development and visibility opportunities.
- There is the potential for finger-pointing instead of accountability when something goes wrong. You need to build the understanding that they are a little team where it's 'one for all and all for one'. Having an understanding that calls can be made to home or to a mobile to check up on urgent work issues should help here. Related to this is the need to build an understanding that

flexibility around the exceptional (not every week) is part of the mix.

- There will be more work for your HR and payroll people—both administration as well as ongoing maintenance. And if this works then others are likely to want to give it a go too.
- Some workmates (especially those who, in retrospect, might have appreciated such an opportunity) may initially have a less than positive reaction. They need to understand that while some effort is going in to make it work for these two (if that's the way you go), that doesn't mean that it's the easy option. Ensure you maintain equity around remuneration and development (especially of the more visible kinds).

We've ended up with more disadvantages than advantages, but they are all things that can be managed around. If you are able to attract and retain good performers with job sharing, it's worth the effort.

POWER STRUGGLE

I seem to be caught in a power struggle between two department heads. They've both made it clear they want to be the next CEO and they both vie for my time and skills which is making life hard for me. How can I serve them both ... and stay sane?
 It sounds as if they are both practising to be CEO already, and I guess that having three

CEOs can be a bit demanding. Providing good service to the existing CEO, both of the aspirers, and the rest, relies on you having established a good HR strategy. This means your allocation of time and initiatives is seen as part of a plan. By communicating the plan, and your progress against it, you are able to put requests into a useful context—rather than having your wannabe CEOs comparing your time for them to what other departments get.

I suspect that their attempts to get your attention are also an indication of you being seen as influential in the final decision. I recommend that you do lunch with them in turn. Discuss the guidelines for allocating HR's time. Then ask them about their career plans. Give your view of the selection criteria. Probably that would include the ability to communicate a clear vision for the business, with a place for HR in making that vision happen.

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If you have a workplace dilemma, send your question to lyndey.swan@thomson.com