

forum members



the Co-operative Group



BT's director of people networks Caroline Waters is chairman of the Employers Forum on Belief – a group of employers who share good practice in relation to employment of mixed faith groups.

© BT People Networks, British Telecommunications plc, 81 Newgate Street, London, EC1A 7AJ, United Kingdom, 1800000



PHME – 47819

Belief & Flexibility

employers
forum
for
belief



We live in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world. No one questions that businesses need to be more agile and flexible in responding to customers demands. As leaders and businesses we have to respond just as flexibly to the varying and growing demands on all our people.

We have all heard about some of the benefits for flexible working, in helping to attract and retain working parents, and carers. Belief is another area where flexible working really does make sense for the business. For leading companies the response to any request for flexible working should be not why, but how will it benefit our business. People are treated as individuals with varying responsibilities, needs and beliefs.

At BT "Respect for one another and valuing each others' individuality are key to our culture and create an environment which is positive and supportive – enabling everyone to perform to the best of their ability." Says Phil Moses, Director, Investor Relations and BT's Champion on Belief.

For many people, important personal responsibilities will come from their beliefs. Many stem from religious beliefs. There are many different religions, most of which encompass a wide range of specific belief systems. Levels of individual observance often depend on personal conscience. However, it is worth noting that there are also many other faith and belief systems. Examples include paganism, atheism, vegetarianism, political convictions, human rights, etc. Whether religious or not most beliefs will impose some rules or responsibilities on our day to day behaviours, but need not reduce people's productivity.

At any point during a year, many different faiths will be celebrating holy days or festivals. For instance during October to January, Jews will celebrate New Year and Tabernacles, Muslims will celebrate Ramadan, Christians will celebrate Christmas and Hindus, Jains and Sikhs will celebrate Diwali.

As a Jew my beliefs influence not only my personal life but also my business life. But I believe that if the individual and the company can take a flexible approach, then both parties can gain. For example, on important holy days, I have a responsibility for ensuring that I meet any of my targets early, or I arrange for a colleague to cover my responsibilities. I also accept that I have to be more flexible at other times, for example I will work Christmas week, to allow others to spend time with their families.

Phil Moses - Director, Investor Relations

Businesses need to know the different needs of employees and plan accordingly. Essential to this is information on all the main holy days and festivals together with an understanding of the varying faiths and beliefs of their people. Individuals need to have the willingness and personal accountability to match their own responsibilities with those of colleagues, customers and business requirements. But all should be easily accommodated with a bit of flexible thinking from all concerned.

And of course the more we understand our peoples' beliefs and commitments the easier it is to plan them into day to day business as usual – and the more they will respond to businesses' needs for flexibility at other times.

While many beliefs have specific requirements at specific times that can appear daunting, in reality most have some flexibility, and it is up to businesses and individuals to work together in order to achieve a win/win situation for both parties.

Faith Matters at Barclays

Barclays new head office, One Churchill Place has been built with the individual needs of employees in mind.

Facilities are provided to support colleagues and visitors to the building who need to take time out for prayer during working hours.

The dedicated Multi Faith Room also includes washing facilities for employees who need them as part of their religious obligations. This enables employees to perform prayers on site, and thereby achieve a better work life balance.

Sharon Roberts, a member of the Canary Wharf Programme Team, says: "As a Christian, having the use of a dedicated on site Multi Faith room is a marvellous resource for structured prayer meetings with others and for personal prayer and meditation. It is especially valuable to be able to spend a few minutes in quiet prayer during the course of the working day."

B&Q Faith Calendar

B&Q, with the help and assistance from our employees from different faith groups, began to produce a calendar of religious festivals and events in 2002. The aim of the calendar is to raise awareness of different festivals and improve understanding of cultural and religious requirements both from an employee and customer perspective. The calendar has developed over the last few years by listening to ideas and feedback from colleagues. This information is updated with a monthly bulletin on our intranet site with more information about the meaning of the festival and how it is celebrated.

"We have got several backgrounds on the site - a mix of agency and BT. 67% of the agency work force are actually of an ethnic background. We make lots of adjustments to working hours, taking into consideration people's different feast days. Lots of the feast days mean that people have to fast at certain times so we change people's shift patterns whilst balancing the needs of the customer. I don't think we have ever had to turn somebody down. We have changed their shift pattern or changed their day off, we have moved their lunch hour. It is not just feast days, it is things like funerals and weddings. A lot of the religions require a lot more input from individuals within the family than perhaps we are used to. People will swap with one another. It is not just the management team, people within the team help by swapping with each other."

Deb Sheahan -
BT Senior Billing Manager,
Customer Call Centre,
Leicester

