

Alternate Work Schedule Is Worth Trying Again

By ROBERT J. CROGHAN | Posted: Monday, March 16, 2015 5:15 pm

Former Labor Relations Commissioner Jim Hanley used to argue that one should not negotiate contracts in the newspapers. Generally speaking, he is right, but even he might agree that there can be exceptions.

The Alternate Work Schedule (AWS) could be such an exception.

The alternate work schedule was introduced during the administration of Mayor Ed Koch. It was his idea that many city employees did not need to work a rigid 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. work schedule. Instead they might be as productive, or even more, if their hours were changed or compressed.



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Eased Rush Hour

At the time the idea was somewhat radical, but one of the ways it was sold was to point out the effect it would have on the New York City "rush hour." On the one hand, our city has one of the most wonderful public-transit systems in the world. On the other hand, you do not want to be in there during rush hour. Reducing the numbers of workers who must be on a subway or in a bus between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., or 5 p.m. and 6 p.m., is an absolute good. When office workers can arrive at 8 a.m. to start work, or leave after 6 p.m. there are two benefits; the rush hour would be less crowded and the early- and late-arriving workers would have a far more comfortable commute as well.

Ed Koch went even a step further and, where it was appropriate, offered a four-day week. Some employees had jobs that would not work on a compressed schedule and others had elements in their personal lives that prevented them, such as child care and other family demands. Some, however, did get to work a four-day week, and those employees remember it with fondness.

'An Absolute Joy'

A four-day work-week can be an absolute joy. If your job is to be an analyst, you can number-crunch, computer-tweak or compile and review reports at any time. By starting at 8 a.m., you avoid the morning rush and arrive at a quiet office where it is easy to begin your work. After 5 p.m. you must remain, until 5:45 p.m., but you again have the advantage of a quieter office and you know you are missing the worst of the evening rush. The fifth day comes as a surprise to long-serving civil servants. We are used to being off on weekends, but our city is different on the weekends. On a weekday there is less crowding of entertainment; it is easy to see doctors or go to necessary or optional appointments and shopping, at leisure, is possible and convenient. Even the public transportation system, if you avoid the rush hour, is faster and more comfortable on a weekday rather than the weekend.

For some workers allowed a compressed work schedule, the day of release from work can come on a Monday or a Friday. All of us now look forward to a three-day weekend, and holidays have in some cases been moved to Monday to give us that treat. That value to some lucky workers under Mayor Koch's plan was a three-day weekend every week of the year.