



Things to Consider During the Election Season

By Jodi Schafer, SPHR, SHRM-SCP | HRM Services | www.WorkWithHRM.com

September 2024

QUESTION: With the national election coming up, I've had several staff ask about flexing their time in order to vote in person. We have a busy company, and we can't always be flexible, however, voting is important and I want to support them. Also, this particular election has become contentious, and I don't want differences in opinions to impact our teamwork and ultimately our services to customers. Any advice?

ANSWER: It is great that you are thinking proactively about these issues. You want your staff to feel free to be themselves at work and to also exercise their civic duty, however, there are boundaries, and you also want to meet the needs of your customers.

Related to time off for voting in person on election day, many companies either provide paid time off or flexible scheduling to support their staff to vote, especially during national elections. Sometimes the company does not require staff to use their own paid time off but provides it as a company benefit. Others do not provide paid time off but allow flexible scheduling. And still others do not offer any flexibility at all. I'd recommend looking into options and deciding how far you can stretch, but still keep your same business hours and coverage.

First, start by asking staff who might need flexibility to vote on election day, also knowing that there are options for mail-in and early voting. Most polling locations also have early and late hours, but some staff may have other family commitments that also prevent them from taking advantage of these early and late times on election day. Ideally, you would ask about this a few weeks in advance, but even the week ahead of time could provide some opportunities for adjusting coverage. While you are trying to be flexible, staff will also need to be flexible as well. Some options might be light coverage over lunch or at certain periods during the day to allow staff to come in late or leave early.

Now turning to the issue of contentious conversations at the office related to political topics. I assume you have written standards and expectations in your employee handbook related to civility, mutual respect, and positive communication between staff. Conversations about political issues and candidates could also fall under these standards and reinforced in the same way.

Being proactive is always a great place to start. At a staff meeting, you might share that you know many are thinking about the election and the issues being discussed. You could remind them that this is a place of work, and your top priorities are providing excellent customer service and having a collaborative work environment. You could say that while you do not want to forbid conversation, you also do not want conversations of that type being overheard by customers. You also expect them to be respectful to each other and their individual beliefs. Work is not the environment to try to convince others to believe what you do or support who you support. It might be a good idea to suggest that they keep conversations of

this type out of the office entirely. Lastly, you could share that if these types of conversations impact work or relationships within the office, that they should expect it to be addressed right away through a direct conversation and potentially disciplinary action.

Being proactive about your expectations and acknowledging that issues may come up helps to prevent issues and to more easily address them if they do arise. It also sets the tone for the type of work environment and culture that you want to have – one of mutual respect no matter the individual beliefs.