



A Pocket Guide to  
A Flexible Future:  
Making it work for you!

## **A pocket guide developed by Working Families**

Working Families is the UK's leading work-life organisation. We provide practical evidence-based support to employees and the organisations for which they work.

- For legal advice contact us on 0800 013 0313
- For support in combining work and caring for a disabled child contact us on 020 7017 0072
- For more practical advice and to find out about our FREE monthly webinars visit our website at [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

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A Pocket Guide to  
**A Flexible Future:**  
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Written and compiled by Liz Morris with Susanne Jacobs

# Foreword

Working Families is the UK's leading work-life balance organisation. We are dedicated to building a future where individuals, families and organisations can thrive. We do this by:

- Providing working parents and carers with free legal and in-work benefits advice and information, and help with negotiating flexible working arrangements
- Providing training and strategic consultancy to employers to develop high performance through employee engagement and wellbeing
- Conducting ground-breaking research to provide evidence for policy makers and employers to improve organisational performance and work-life balance

- Campaigning for everyone to have the opportunity to find the balance they need between work and family life

With over 30 years of expertise in the field of work-life balance and flexible working, plus the support of employers and opinion formers, we can make a positive difference to organisations and to the lives of families.

This pocket guide represents a small part of what we do. We hope that you will find it useful, as many others have, in developing your own sense of balance together with a thriving family life and career.



Sarah Jackson, OBE  
CEO Working Families



## **Working Families**

The UK's leading work-life organisation

Supporting policy makers, employers and families

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We all have opinions and beliefs about others; what they stand for, their motives and their ability to deliver.

Think about any famous person. Even though you have probably never met them you will still have an instant emotional response to their name or picture.

Think about your colleagues. What are the instant assumptions you make about them?

Now, think about yourself. What is it that you want others to instantly think of you?



# 1. Your place in a changing world

During the last 30 years the nature of work and our society has changed dramatically. It is now common to work in a virtual, flexible way with colleagues dispersed by geography and time. Many organisations support a global client base and many employees need flexibility to balance responsibilities across different areas of life and maintain their energy and wellbeing.

Building relationships, trust and a career in this virtual, flexible world can be a challenge.

The key is to understand your own needs, wants and desires and to develop a powerful personal brand that quickly communicates your values, strengths and ambitions.

# What is your brand?

A brand is a promise. It is a promise that comes to mind as soon as you hear a name or see a picture. It is an instant emotional response.

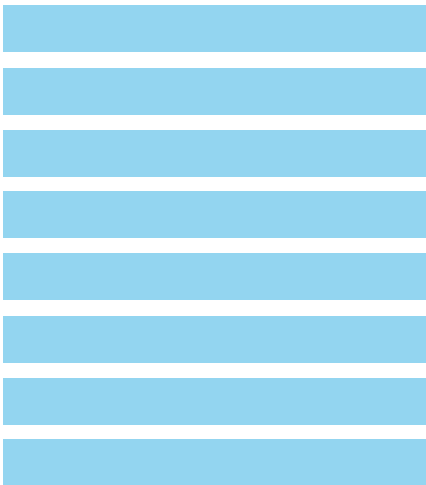
Your brand is what others believe to be true of you whether you are physically with them or not.

In a world where increasingly we are working remotely from colleagues and stakeholders your brand is a key tool for building trust and developing your career.

What do you want others to think when they hear your name?

Use the space opposite to jot down your ideas.

What I want others to think  
when they hear my name



## 2. The raw materials

A powerful personal brand is authentic and integrated. To build an authentic brand you must understand your values and strengths and from this, determine what makes you unique.

### TIP:

Some of our values are so deeply held that we are not consciously aware of them. These are known as cognitive biases. You can identify your bias using the Implicit Association Test (IAT) [www.implicit.harvard.edu](http://www.implicit.harvard.edu)



# What are my values?

Values are as unique to each of us as our fingerprints. Use the space below to capture the core set of values that guide your life.

The form consists of seven horizontal, light blue rectangular bars stacked vertically, providing space for the user to write their values.

Now test yourself. If the world were to persecute you for holding these values, would you continue to hold them?

# My strengths

We can spend years practicing things we are not naturally good at only to get them up to an average performance. To excel we must focus on our strengths.

You can use a tool like the Gallup Strengths Finder ([www.strengthsfinder.com](http://www.strengthsfinder.com)) or complete this exercise using the table opposite.

- Think about the activities you do in every aspect of your life
- Place an X in the “Enjoyment” column to indicate which of the following strengths you enjoy using
- Place an X in the “Ability” column to indicate your strongest abilities
- Highlight the areas where your enjoyment and abilities overlap
- For those that overlap rank your top 5 strengths
- Reflect on how you are using your strengths today and how you could use them

Enjoyment	Strengths	Ability
	Planning and organising	
	Tenacity	
	Adaptability	
	Making decisions	
	Problem solving	
	Researching and analysing	
	Developing others	
	Team work	
	Dependability	
	Making sense of ambiguity	
	Achieving	
	Negotiating	
	Verbal communication	
	Written communication	
	Caring	
	Facilitating	
	Listening	
	Learning	
	Diplomacy	
	Creativity and innovation	
	Creating strategy	
	Motivating others	
	Self-control	
	Connecting people	
	Humour	
	Positivity	

# My uniqueness

Building your brand is about seeing how you uniquely connect with others and contribute to the world in which you live.

Your uniqueness gives you your competitive edge. Take a look back at your achievements, both in your career and personal life. How did you use your strengths and values as an individual, as part of a team and as part of a business? What are you most proud of? What is it about you that is hard to copy? How does your contribution increase the value of your team and your organisation?

If you had just one “tweet” to describe your uniqueness, what would it be?

Use the space on the page opposite to capture your 140 character tweet.



# My contribution™



What makes you unique?

140 [Tweet](#)

# 3. Developing a strategy

The next stage is to identify what you want and then to develop a strategy that matches this to the needs, wants and desires of your stakeholders.

In order to develop a strategy that will mutually benefit you, your family, your organisation and your colleagues you need to:

- Identify your goals
- Understand your need for flexibility
- Identify your flexible working options
- Identify your stakeholders
- Understand their needs, wants and desires
- Create your brand positioning

# My goals

Take a moment to dream; if money and time were limitless what would you do? What is it that you most desire?

With this dream in mind, take a look back at your values. How does this dream fit with your values? The goals that inspire you most will be based on your values.

Now bring your dreams back to the present. What are the priorities for your life right now, emotionally, spiritually, physically and intellectually?

1

2.

3.

4.

Now think about your future goals. Ensure that each is specific and time bound. Consider what your first step will be.

What do I want in 2-5 years?

What do I want in 10 years?

For each of these statements, consider how they fit with your values and your strengths and how you will know when these goals are achieved.

# My need for flexibility

Our need for flexibility changes with life stage and/or interests. It can be related to family responsibilities or driven by the pursuit of another passion.



For example, expecting your first child is often a time when many people think about how to rebalance their lives. With both men and women working, the way in which parenting and caring roles are shared in a family is no longer bound by tradition. It is increasingly common for men to work flexibly as well as women in order to have hands-on family involvement and good work-life balance.

Milestones such as the birth of a second child, the start of school or the onset of caring for elderly or less able loved ones may mean that you need some form of flexibility in the way you work.

In order to understand your need for flexibility, build a list of those things you need or want to do on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. For each task challenge yourself and ask if it is a “need” or a “want”. Whenever you find yourself saying “I should” change your statement to “I choose to” or “I choose not to”. If you share parenting or caring responsibilities then do this exercise together with those you share with!

For each task assign a responsibility and a back-up plan. This may be an iterative process as you identify flexibility in your work roles.

**TIP:**

You can find useful guides to managing maternity, returning to work and combining work with caring for a loved one at [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

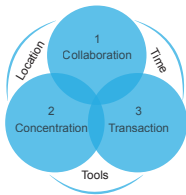
# Identifying my flexible options™

The potential for flexibility in the way you work will depend on:

- Your employer's practices and policies
- Your legal rights (visit [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk))
- Your role
- Your capability
- Your manager's capability and attitude

The following exercise will help you to identify the flexibility in your role. Discuss the options with your manager or team leader in a proactive professional way, this will help them to support you.

Every role is made up of different types of work: collaboration, concentration and transaction processing. Each of these will have dependencies on when and where the work can be done and the tools required to do it.



Use the following exercise to identify patterns and find the flexibility in your role.

1. Use copies of the table on the next page or set up a spreadsheet with the same column headings.
2. Use this to keep a diary for a week or month.
3. When you have completed your diary add the following columns and categorise each row
  - (i) "Work type" is it "collaboration", "concentration" or "transaction"?
  - (ii) "Time dependency" is it required in "real time" or can it be done in "batches"?
4. If you have not used a spreadsheet, then transfer the data now into a spreadsheet. Sort by "Task description". Can any of the rows be added together? If so sum the durations and make a note in the Time/date column to capture if this is done daily, weekly or monthly.
5. Sort by "Time dependency". Simplify by adding rows together where possible.
6. Sort by "Work type" and "Tools". Set up a column for "Location dependency" and note down if each task can be done remotely.
7. What patterns emerge? Are there logical chunks where you can split your role for part-time working? Where can you flex start and finish times or split your working day? Where can you work from home to reduce commute time?



## My diary

Time/ date	Task description	Key project/ stakeholder	Duration (hrs)	Other participants	Tools	Work type	Time dependency	Location dependency

"Work type" = "collaboration", "concentration" or "transaction". "Time dependency" = "real time" or "batch",  
"Location dependency" = "remote" or "on site"

# Are you ready for flexible working?

The term “Flexible Working” refers to an arrangement that changes where or when you work, or the number of hours that you work. It can be temporary or on-going and it can be an ad hoc arrangement or formalised in a change of your employment contract.

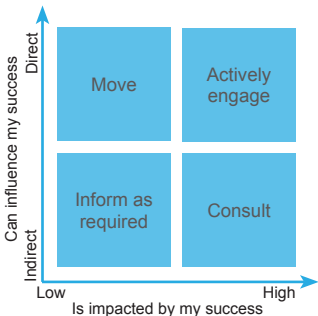
Here are some questions to help you consider if you are ready to work flexibly:

- Are you self-disciplined and comfortable working without close supervision?
- Do you trust yourself, your colleagues and manager to work professionally?
- Are you prepared to understand and define what others expect from you?
- Do you feel confident managing expectation and demonstrating achievements?

If you are able to answer “Yes” to all of these then visit [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk) for a practical guide to requesting flexible work.

# Identifying stakeholders

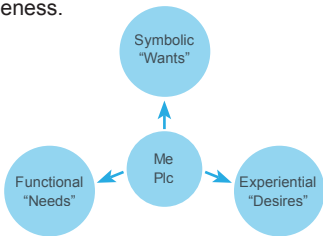
Who is it that can facilitate or block your career? Your boss, your colleagues, your partner and probably a few others that you haven't thought of. Use the matrix below to identify your career stakeholders and potential sponsors and mentors.



You may also find it helpful to draw lines between those that are linked or can influence each other.

# My brand positioning

For each of your stakeholders with direct influence over your career and/or who are impacted by your success, identify their needs, wants and desires and how you can contribute to these using your strengths and uniqueness.



Use this information to work out how to move the stakeholders shown in the top left quadrant of your analysis, that is, those who have direct influence over your career but are not directly impacted by your success.

## TIPS:

- Look in the top right quadrant of your stakeholder analysis to identify a potential mentor and sponsor.
- Ask for help from those in the top right quadrant to influence and move those in the top left.

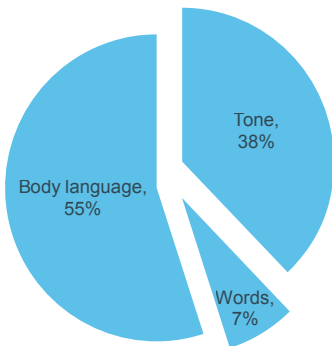
# 4. Building relationships

Safety is a primary driver for all of us. We need to trust those we work with, even more so when working remotely or in situations where we cannot “see” what people are doing. To build strong relationships we need to:

- Create a communication heartbeat
- Choose the right media
- Understand how to manage potential bias in oneself and in others

# How we communicate

With so little of how we communicate reliant on the actual words used, how do we build positive trusting relationships over distance and time?



Source: Professor Albert Mehrabian

# Creating a heartbeat

If relationships are not nurtured then they will decay. Create a communication plan for each of your stakeholders that meets their needs, wants and desires. This is the heartbeat that will give life to your relationships.

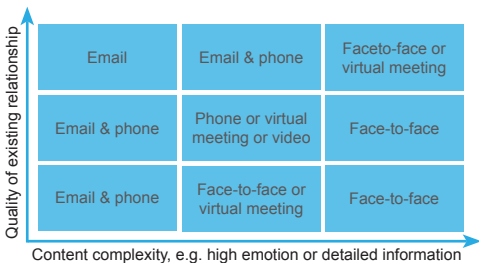
## TIPS:

- Level the playing field when you are working remotely from your stakeholders by diarising the seemingly “ad-hoc” communication eg the, “I just called to catch-up” phone call.
- Understand your stakeholders’ movements so that you know the best time for the quick chat or longer session.
- Use frequent small chunks of communication.

# Choosing the right media

The best way to communicate and collaborate will depend on what you want to achieve, the complexity of the content and also the quality of the relationship and preferred method of those you are working with.

Use the Effective Communication Grid™ below to guide your choice of media.





# Managing bias

Bias effects every observation and decision that we make and that others make about us. This is why a strong personal brand is important.

A bias is the ability to learn something so well that we no longer think about it consciously. It is core to our ability to adapt and survive.

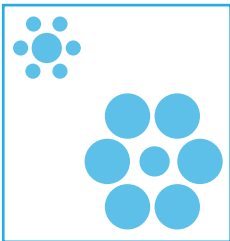
The Nobel Prize winners Kahneman and Twersky describe the human brain as having two ways of processing; “fast” (intuitive, instinctive and automatic) and “slow” (effortful and resource intensive).

We spend most of our lives thinking “fast”, that is, using biases.

When “fast” thinking reaches a conclusion our brains tend to accept this, we then continue to see what we want to see. Visit [www.theinvisiblegorilla.com](http://www.theinvisiblegorilla.com) for an example of our limited perception and the pitfalls of trying to counteract one bias.

## Managing one’s own bias

Recognise that “fast” thinking is reactive and intuitive and can make mistakes. Next time you feel blocked or unfairly treated stop, identify the evidence and ask yourself “How else can I think about this?” and “What are my options?”, then choose how to act.



Look at the circles in the centre of both clusters. Are they the same size? “Fast” thinking will tell you that one is bigger, “slow” thinking will show you they are the same size.

## Managing around bias in others

A powerful brand creates an immediate “fast” thinking response in others. It is possible to use your brand to replace generalisations that may be made because of factors like gender, age and colour.

### TIPS:

- Maximise face-to-face opportunities using these to build rapport.
- Don't spend potential informal meeting time working away in a corner on your laptop.
- Recognise that generalisations are examples of “fast “ thinking and are learnt. Identify opportunities for your stakeholders to learn about your personal brand and replace the generalisation, e.g. through personal relationships or through your sponsors or mentor. Direct confrontation often leads to entrenchment.

# 5. Developing collateral

Your marketing collateral is the material you use to reinforce your brand. It includes what you say, how you act, how you look and anything on which your image or name appears. More subtly, it also includes conversations that people may have about you.

Two key elements of your marketing collateral are:

- The engagement pitch
- Personal PR (which in turn can create positive conversation about you)

# Engagement pitch

We all assess people within a split second of meeting them. Then we look for supporting evidence. An engagement pitch is a good tool to reinforce that initial impression and to build ongoing support and engagement.

Being pre-prepared can also help to boost your confidence and create a positive impression.

There are two parts to an engagement pitch:

- A demonstration of your commitment and understanding of your stakeholders' needs by sharing things that are going well or achievements.
- A desire to show respect for your stakeholders' knowledge and experience and gain a deeper understanding of their needs by asking for help or direction. Asking for help also builds a sense of co-ownership and responsibility.

Use this space to prepare an engagement pitch.

Going well / achievements

Need help or advice

Example engagement pitch

# Personal PR

Become aware of opportunities to create brand exposure. Be sure that the way you use these opportunities is authentic and resonates with your values.

## TIPS:

- Make sure that your profile and activity on social media is consistent with your brand, e.g. blog posts, LinkedIn, Plaxo, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.
- Get involved with work groups or external communities as a way to develop personally as well as provide a contribution. Community involvement is also a clear demonstration of your values.
- Become the centre of a network either through your ability to connect people together and/or by sharing your knowledge.

Your brand reputation is built on your actions. Pause before you act and check that what you are about to say or do is aligned to your values and builds the credibility of your brand.

# 6. Delivering and learning

How and what you deliver will back up the initial feelings and beliefs your colleagues and boss have about you. To build credibility you need to:

- Manage expectations
- Seek and receive feedback

It takes a large event plus lots of smaller reinforcements to change an opinion. So bear this in mind if you are repositioning your brand. The good news is that it can be done!

## TIPS:

To reposition your brand follow the advice of McKinsey and evolve a new position:

- Recognise the current position of your brand.
- Provide a bridge from the current position to the new position based on emotional triggers and values and creating a sense of safety.
- Do what you say you're going to do and deliver against your new promise.



# Managing expectations

Your brand is your promise. With every promise there is excitement and anticipation. Delivering what is promised builds credibility and trust. By doing what you promise you will be rewarded with greater freedom and autonomy.

Promise only what you can deliver and manage expectations along the delivery journey, both formally and informally.

# What to do when things go wrong

In life things don't always go to plan. We cannot control every variable or circumstance. The only things that we can ever really control are our own thoughts and actions. By recognising and taking responsibility for these we become more effective. In turn, others will feel more confident working with us.

## TIPS:

- Calm an emotional situation by consciously acknowledging and labelling your emotions as such.
- Create focus and energy by asking yourself what there is to learn and how can you think about things differently.
- Choose how you want to act and then take action.

# Seeking feedback

Seeking and receiving feedback will reinforce your relationships and help you better meet the needs of your stakeholders. It also demonstrates your commitment to the organisation and your career. In listening actively we show how much we value the person providing feedback and demonstrate our ability to learn and grow.

Proactively seeking feedback creates an open conversation about performance. It helps both you and your stakeholders to focus on what is important and on development rather than control. It builds trust and will allow you to have more freedom and autonomy.

Understand whether the feedback you receive is helpful or unhelpful. You can use the grid below.

	Positive	Negative
Specific	Helpful feedback	
Generic	Unhelpful feedback	

#### TIPS:

- Seek specific, actionable feedback by listening actively and asking questions.
- Receive feedback as a gift. Providing feedback carries the risk of rejection. Help those sharing feedback to feel comfortable and say "Thank you".
- Pause, process and make a positive choice about what to do with feedback received.

# A Flexible Future:

## *You can make it work for you*

The nature of work and our society will continue to change. Increasingly all of us will need to approach work in a flexible way; for our own health and wellbeing and to achieve our career goals and the goals of the organisations with which we work.

Understanding your needs and values, building a strategy and developing a strong personal brand is core to your ability to ride the waves of change and develop a rewarding and flexible career path as well as good work-life balance.

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# A Pocket Guide to A Flexible Future: Making it work for you!

A practical pocket guide to balancing your life and developing a successful career.

*“As a working parent myself, I know how difficult it can be when work and family seem to be pulling in opposite directions. This fantastic pocket guide from Working Families provides an insightful and practical approach to help you to create a balanced and thriving life, both at work and home.”* Cherie Booth QC

Working Families is the UK's leading work-life organisation providing practical evidence-based support to working families, organisations and policy makers.

[www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

Retail price: £6.95