

# Extended Hours

## *Help or Hindrance?*

With customers scarce these days, companies are searching for competitive edges at every juncture. This includes softening the boundaries for scheduling appointments.

In response to customer complaints about having to take time off of work for the various tasks of the new home process, some organizations are instituting evening and weekend hours. Should you do the same and if so, how?

The choice is not simple one, especially for smaller companies. Regardless of company size, several factors require serious thought:

Open 'til 8:00? Let's start with the reality that if you extend hours for selection and warranty inspections until 8:00 p.m. two nights a week. That's two nights a week personnel are likely to be working until 8:30 or even later. Often appointments with customers begin a bit late and last a bit longer than planned.

## Safety

Working late—after dark with few other people around—raises security issues. As the design coordinator walks to her car at 8:45 p.m., how much risk is involved?

## Normal Business Hour Staffing

Will the adjustments leave you short of personnel during regular business hours? Teams need time together to, well, to be teams. Will staff meetings and other routine processes occur smoothly?

## Front Line Support

Supervisors, IT, accounting, specialized company tools or equipment, and other support services are likely to be unavailable.

## Lighting Needs

Meetings such as the frame stage tour, new home orientation, and some warranty inspections need adequate daylight to be done well. In fact, especially during the winter, schedules for these meetings may be further constrained.

Walking a frame stage home in dim light can be dangerous and being unable to see items clearly defeats the purpose. For instance, most builders want to begin an orientation no later than 2:00 or 3:00 at the latest so that all cosmetic surfaces can be fairly seen. Color/material choices are frequently best made with both natural and artificial light available.

## Compensation

Will employees who work non-traditional hours expect non-traditional pay? Adjustments related to extended hours may impact home prices and if so, consider carefully which is a greater advantage in your marketplace--flexible hours or lower price.

## Trade Participation

Likely to be thin. Will it do any good to perform some warranty repairs and still need to make an appointment with the homeowners to complete all items on their list?

## Sustainability

While you may have staff members who are willing or even happy to work evenings and weekends now, how difficult will it be to sustain that long-term?

Answers to each of these concerns are available. Most of these answers come at a cost. So the real issue comes down to this: Do your buyers want this flexibility to accept its imperfections and a slightly higher home price?

Offering such a program and having it cause new problems may be worse than not offering it. This is not to say "Don't do it!!" Rather, study carefully and ensure you are prepared to deal with the challenges that come with it.