

Flexibility at Novartis: Shamsah Kazani

Kazani describes how her flexible work arrangement helps her balance her personal and professional lives.

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The “Flexibility at Novartis” series spotlights associates who have one thing in common: They work flexibly. As a result, they are able to manage the demands of their work and private lives. Flexible working can boost employee engagement while increasing efficiency and productivity. This series provides a glimpse into flexible working at Novartis.

Shamsah Kazani is Director of Translational Medicine at the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research (NIBR) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the US. She shares her story below.

Turning anguish into harmony, through flexibility

In 2013, I joined NIBR as a Translational Medicine Expert. I came into the office every day and worked a “normal” schedule – until a year later, when my 7-year-old son, Neel, relocated from Boston, Massachusetts, to Nashville, Tennessee, with his father. My home and work worlds were conflicted.

Watching my son move 1 100 miles (1 770 kilometers) away was the hardest experience I have been through in my life. Had I not been at Novartis, I would have dropped everything and moved to Nashville to be closer to him. However, I absolutely loved my work at Novartis and was so passionate about making a difference for patients that I could not bring myself to give up on that.

My manager recognized the anguish I felt as I struggled to find a balance between my personal and professional lives. I drafted a proposal for a possible flexible work arrangement and I shared it with my

manager, who agreed: I would travel to Nashville every other week and work remotely from there for approximately 30% of my required work hours. I would fly out on Wednesday evening and return to Boston on Sunday, Monday or Tuesday, depending on my work responsibilities and meeting schedules. This arrangement started as a “pilot” for six months; we would assess its impact on my deliverables and the advancement of my clinical programs, as well as on my son’s well-being and my ability to cope with the travel involved.

The Novartis culture that enables flexibility at work brings out the best version of me at work, for patients, and at home, for my son.

It has now been more than four years since that initial agreement. My son is almost 12 years old and has blossomed into a charming preteen. I travel to Nashville every other week and work from my apartment there while he is at school.

This arrangement required compromise and some sacrifice on my part...and a LOT of planning. From meetings, deliverables and presentations, to flight arrangements, car rentals and additional bills, to Neel’s parent-teacher meetings, piano performances, playdates, tennis lessons and summer camps, this juggling act takes energy. I often find myself working on evenings and weekends when my programs need attention. But it is all worth it: I am happy, my son is happy, and we have a beautiful, high-quality relationship.

When I am back in Cambridge, I am fulfilled and energized, and able to give my projects my undivided attention, which I believe greatly enhances the quality of my work and my outputs. It is a win-win-win: for me, for my son and for my projects at Novartis.

My personal life and my work are in perfect harmony. This is possible because of the tremendous support I receive from my generous managers, my compassionate colleagues and my incredible teams. The Novartis culture that enables flexibility at work brings out the best version of me at work, for patients, and at home, for my son.

What does flexibility at work mean to you?

Flexibility means that my personal life and my work are in perfect harmony.

A Novartis associate says her personal and professional lives are in perfect harmony, thanks to #flexibleworking.

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