

# Operational Best Practices

## For 24/7 Shift Work

Expert guidance from consultants who have worked with hundreds of 24/7 operations.

Guide 8

### WHO WE ARE

Shiftwork Solutions LLC is a leading U.S.-based management consulting firm specializing in shift schedule design, workforce engagement, and operational optimization for 24/7 industrial operations. For over 30 years we have helped hundreds of manufacturing plants, distribution centers, mines, utilities, and processing facilities across more than 16 industries build better schedules, reduce costs, and create workforces that stay.

### OUR PROCESS

1

#### Assess

We start by understanding your operation, schedule, costs, and workforce composition.

2

#### Design

Schedule options built for operations AND people — with full cost and coverage clarity.

3

#### Deliver

Rollout support, employee education, policy development, and ongoing guidance.

4

#### Sustain

Post-implementation survey, results review, and adjustments to ensure it holds.

### OUR EXPERIENCE

30+

Years of dedicated shiftwork consulting

Hundreds

Operations helped across North America

16+

Industries served in every engagement

Fixed

Fee model — no hourly billing surprises

Ready to discuss your operation? The conversation is free.

(415) 265-1621 [Contact@shift-work.com](mailto:Contact@shift-work.com) [shift-work.com/contact](http://shift-work.com/contact)

## INTRODUCTION

## What Makes 24/7 Operations Different

Running a 24/7 operation is fundamentally different from managing a traditional five-day business. The complexities multiply in ways that are not obvious until you are living with them. Equipment runs continuously. Workers experience dramatically different lifestyles than their day-shift counterparts. Communication spans multiple shifts that never overlap. Policies designed for Monday-through-Friday operations break down when weekends disappear as a concept.

The practices that distinguish excellent shift operations from struggling ones have been refined through decades of experience across hundreds of facilities. These are not theoretical principles but hard-won lessons from real operations facing real challenges.

### OPERATIONAL HEALTH CHECK — KEY WARNING SIGNS (SAMPLE)

- Overtime exceeds 15% of total hours
- Turnover above industry average
- Night shift skill gaps chronic
- Coverage scramble every weekend
- Supervisors spend time on scheduling
- Vacation requests cause conflict
- Equipment downtime at shift changes
- Employees feel uninformed about changes

Sample of 8 indicators from the full 26 Warning Signs diagnostic. If three or more apply to your operation, a schedule review is likely warranted. Full checklist at [shift-work.com/resources/26-warning-signs-schedule-problems/](https://shift-work.com/resources/26-warning-signs-schedule-problems/)

## SCHEDULE FOUNDATION

## Why Everything Starts with Schedule Design

Every aspect of operational performance connects back to schedule design. The schedule determines who shows up when, how much overtime you will need, whether you can attract quality workers, and whether your workforce stays or leaves. Getting this foundation right creates a platform for excellence.

Managers and workers evaluate schedules from completely different perspectives. Managers judge a schedule primarily by the coverage it provides. Workers judge a schedule by the time off it provides. This fundamental difference explains much of the disconnect that occurs during schedule discussions.

More than 80 percent of shift workers prefer fixed shifts over rotating schedules. Over 60 percent would accept a fixed shift that is not their preferred time slot rather than rotate through different shifts. Fixed shifts allow workers to establish permanent routines, make long-term commitments, and build lives around predictable schedules.

<p><b>80%+</b></p> <p><b>Prefer fixed shifts</b></p> <p>Workers will accept a less-preferred fixed shift rather than rotate indefinitely. Progression opportunity matters more than current assignment.</p>	<p><b>60%+</b></p> <p><b>Management absence</b></p> <p>More than 60% of shift hours occur when top management is not present. Each shift develops its own culture and communication patterns.</p>	<p><b>78</b></p> <p><b>Extra days off</b></p> <p>Continuous 12-hour schedules provide up to 78 more days off annually than traditional 5-day patterns — the single most compelling benefit.</p>
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CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS

## More Attractive Than They Appear

Ask random people whether they would like to work 12-hour days and give up half their weekends, and virtually everyone says no. Reframe the question: Would you like 78 additional days off annually, 10 percent more income, the ability to get seven consecutive days off using only 24 vacation hours, virtual elimination of mandatory overtime, and dramatically improved chances of reaching a fixed day shift? The answer changes completely.

These benefits exist only with continuous schedules, and employees who experience them firsthand understand their value. Companies transitioning from seven-day continuous operations back to five-day schedules face significantly more workforce resistance than those moving in the opposite direction.

“ Ask someone on the street if they want to work weekends and give up their Saturdays. They will say no. Show them 78 more days off and 10 percent more income, and suddenly the conversation changes completely.

— Jim Dillingham, Shiftwork Solutions

EQUIPMENT & MAINTENANCE

## Why Continuous Running Reduces Breakdowns

Most maintenance personnel confirm that equipment startup represents the highest risk period for breakdowns. The thermal cycling, pressure changes, and mechanical stresses that occur during startup create conditions where failures are most likely. The logical implication: never shut down equipment needlessly.

Run continuously whenever possible and stop only when no reasonable alternative exists. Consider a facility with seven machines running five days weekly with weekend shutdowns. Reconfiguring to five machines running continuously seven days while idling two for maintenance rotation delivers identical weekly production hours while eliminating unnecessary startups.

Maintenance scheduling changes fundamentally when operations run continuously. The traditional approach of handling maintenance during weekend shutdowns disappears. Planned maintenance must be built into the schedule

explicitly, with equipment rotation creating windows for service without production interruption.

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#### LABOR ECONOMICS

## The True Cost of Your Staffing Options

Many organizations make labor decisions without clearly understanding the fully loaded cost of different options. Straight time and overtime are typically within 5 to 10 percent of each other when you account for all factors. Overtime pays time-and-a-half for hours worked, but straight time includes full benefits, paid time off, training costs, and administrative overhead that overtime does not carry on additional hours.

When understaffed and using overtime to cover gaps, the adverse cost equals only the premium portion of overtime wages. When overstaffed, the adverse cost represents full wages and benefits paid for labor that provides no operational value. The cost penalty for overstaffing typically runs ten times higher than the penalty for understaffing.

Temporary workers appear to cost less per hour than permanent employees, but this can mask significantly lower productivity. At one facility, temporary labor cost approximately 75 percent of straight-time rates, but full-time employees were six times more productive in certain positions. The lower hourly rate became irrelevant when productivity differences were factored in.

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#### CROSS-TRAINING

## Strategic, Not Universal

When considering cross-training, many managers immediately conclude that everyone must learn everyone else's job. This approach is both unnecessary and impractical. The more effective principle trains for adjacent roles to create cascading coverage flexibility.

Imagine a crew of twenty employees arranged in a circle by skill level. The answer to adequate coverage regardless of absence: everyone knows their job plus the job of the person to their left. When the highest-skilled position becomes vacant, everyone bumps one position. This cascade continues until the least-skilled position opens, which a new hire can fill.

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#### COMMUNICATION

## The Single Biggest Factor in Performance

The single biggest factor affecting workforce performance is communication quality and frequency. A common mistake is assuming that any message has been received and understood after a single effort. Safe practice requires broadcasting the same information multiple times through varied platforms.

If you are implementing a change that should be received positively but employees do not perceive it that way, you have under-communicated. A grumbling workforce signals the need for more communication, not less. There is no such thing as over-communicating when it comes to workplace changes that affect personal lives.

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Sixty percent or more of the time a shift worker is at work, top management is not present. Each shift functions almost like a separate company, developing its own culture and informal communication patterns. These dynamics require deliberate effort to overcome.

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#### WORKFORCE REALITIES

## Labor Markets and Recruiting

Approximately 5 percent of every workforce remains dissatisfied with any option offered. Understanding this is normal will save effort often wasted trying to achieve impossible consensus. Move forward for the remaining 95 percent rather than holding things up for naysayers who will not get on board regardless.

Recruiting from another facility requires substantially more than matching their current wage. People leaving a job give up seniority, workplace friendships, respect earned through performance, and established daily routines. These intangible factors have real value. The premium required to overcome them typically runs 15 to 25 percent above current compensation.



You need not be perfect to attract and retain employees. You just need to be their best available option. Know your real competition and outperform them on the factors that matter most to your workforce.

— Dan Capshaw, Shiftwork Solutions

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#### GOING CONTINUOUS

## The Transition to 24/7 Operations

Going to a continuous operation has broad organizational impact and should not be taken lightly. Common drivers include startup and shutdown costs that make weekend closures prohibitively expensive, high capital equipment costs that demand maximum utilization, facility constraints where expansion is not feasible, customer responsiveness requirements, and inventory optimization opportunities.

The transition requires addressing numerous interdependent issues. Employee communication must explain what is happening, when, and to whom. Staffing levels increase approximately 33 percent when moving from five-day to seven-day operations. The workforce reaction depends heavily on information — if employees understand the business case and see how the new schedule affects their income and time off, acceptance improves dramatically.

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#### CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

## Excellence Is an Ongoing Process

Excellence in shift operations is not a destination but an ongoing process. Labor markets change. Technology evolves. Customer demands shift. What worked perfectly last year may be inadequate today. Regular evaluation

identifies what is working well, what needs improvement, and whether changes are achieving intended results.

The organizations that achieve sustained excellence approach operations systematically, involve their workforce meaningfully, base decisions on comprehensive analysis rather than assumptions, and recognize when challenges exceed internal experience and seek appropriate guidance.

**Ready to apply these best practices to your operation?**

Call (415) 265-1621 | [Contact@shift-work.com](mailto:Contact@shift-work.com) | Book a free consultation: [shift-work.com/contact](https://shift-work.com/contact)