

MENA Forward presents: Ramadan Guidance for employees

Ramadan is a month in which Muslims who are healthy and able fast from food and drink between dawn and sunset.

But Ramadan is not just about refraining from eating. It's a time of cultivating discipline to let go of negative habits and behaviors and replace them with healthier, kinder actions.

Muslims are encouraged to make personal "spring cleaning," meaningful change in themselves while fasting, such as not to lose one's temper or act unkindly, otherwise this would break their fast.

It's a time of reflection, self-improvement, spiritual growth, charity, and family and community time.

Here are some tips for an inclusive atmosphere for your Muslim colleagues:

-It's OK to simply say "Happy Ramadan!" Traditional greetings include "Ramadan Mubarak" and "Ramadan Kareem." Your coworker will be very appreciative of your thoughtfulness no matter the language.

-Don't feel shy to eat or drink around your colleagues. Many of us don't mind and are used to this!

-Try to be aware that your Muslim colleague will be breaking fast ("iftar") at sundown and may need to step away from work at that time. You can see when sunset is on your phone (weather app if you're using iPhone).

-Some may adjust their work hours slightly to accommodate for fatigue and be their sharpest.

-Understand that those with health issues may not be fasting, but still partake in other traditions of the month, and are still observing Ramadan.

-Try to be aware that many Muslims are more deliberate about carving out time for their five daily prayers, some occur during the typical work hours. They are short times of meditation and coincide with times of the day (dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and nighttime).

-After the 30 days, Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr. It's a significant holiday, so allow your Muslim employee if they request to take that day off to celebrate with loved ones.

Tips & ideas for covering Ramadan in your community

Cover the start of Ramadan, what it means and how will it be marked in your community.

Visit and write about mosque services, iftars (fast-breaking meal shared in family and community settings), festivals and festivities for Eid al-Fitr marking the end of Ramadan.

Write about charity efforts and importance of charity during Ramadan.

Spotlight popular Ramadan foods and how restaurants adapt to Ramadan fasting and meal hours.

Show how municipal and state activities marking Ramadan - such as iftars, mosque visits and fanous (lantern) lighting events - reflect growing size and influence of local Muslim communities.

Show how schools are including Muslim students. For instance, are they teaching about Ramadan, giving students day off for Eid al-Fitr, accommodating student fasting and prayer?

Be creative. Past Ramadan stories have featured moon sighting traditions; crowds at 24-hour diners for pre-sunrise meal; Ramadan decorating at home; high school athletes fasting; teaching about Ramadan at schools.

To find stories and sources, reach out to mosque officials, local leaders and community members. Scan social media for Ramadan-themed events, such as pop-up markets and charity drives. Have conversations about how people are celebrating and if they are doing anything differently this year. You may find a story you hadn't expected.