

The Working Muslim in Ramadan



**Employer
Guide**



“Islam sets out very clearly the need for Muslims to find a balance when they try to fulfil their obligations to themselves, their families, the society and to God. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims face the added challenge of balancing their obligations to worship God more whilst also performing to the best of their abilities for their employers. The Working Muslim in Ramadan guide will be extremely useful in providing employers and Muslims helpful information about Ramadan. I believe this guide is a must for every workplace.”

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra

Chair, Mosque and Community Affairs Committee, MCB.

Community Ambassador, 1st Ethical Charitable Trust.

Co Chair, Christian Muslim Forum.

“I see The Working Muslim in Ramadan guide as a vital tool for enhancing good relations between organisations and their Muslim employees. Fasting is a key tradition within the Christian and Muslim faiths and Ramadan is an important time of reflection and fasting for Muslims. I would encourage all employers and employees to read these guides.

The Right Reverend Bishop Richard Cheetham

Co Chair, Christian Muslim Forum

Acknowledgements

All praise belongs to Allah, the All-Compassionate, the All-Merciful.

This guide has been prepared by Saiyyidah Zaidi-Stone, founder of Working Muslim. Established in 2010, Working Muslim is an organisation enabling Muslims to balance their responsibilities to work, faith, family and society.

Saiyyidah is also Development Director for 1st Ethical Charitable Trust. Originally trained as an architect, Saiyyidah has worked in both the public and private sector for over 20 years. Saiyyidah prepared this guide in order to enable Muslims and their employers and colleagues to have the necessary information relating to being a Working Muslim in Ramadan. The aim is for Muslims and non Muslims to have a shared understanding of the etiquettes of Ramadan and working.

Saiyyidah would like to thank Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, Abu Haleema and reviewers who did not want to be named for their contributions to the development of this guide.



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What is Working Muslim?

Working Muslim is a organisation enabling Muslims to balance their responsibilities to work, faith, family and society. To contact Working Muslim please email info@workingmuslim.com and we will respond to your request in two working days, if your message is urgent please mark it so and we will respond sooner, God willing.

Why is this guide needed?

With the number of Muslims increasing in the UK it is important for employers to know about the month of Ramadan and what it means for Muslims. This note is intended to increase understanding about the month of Ramadan and offer advice on how to be supportive of colleagues among you who are fasting; as well as offering some guidance on dealing with customers during the month of fasting.

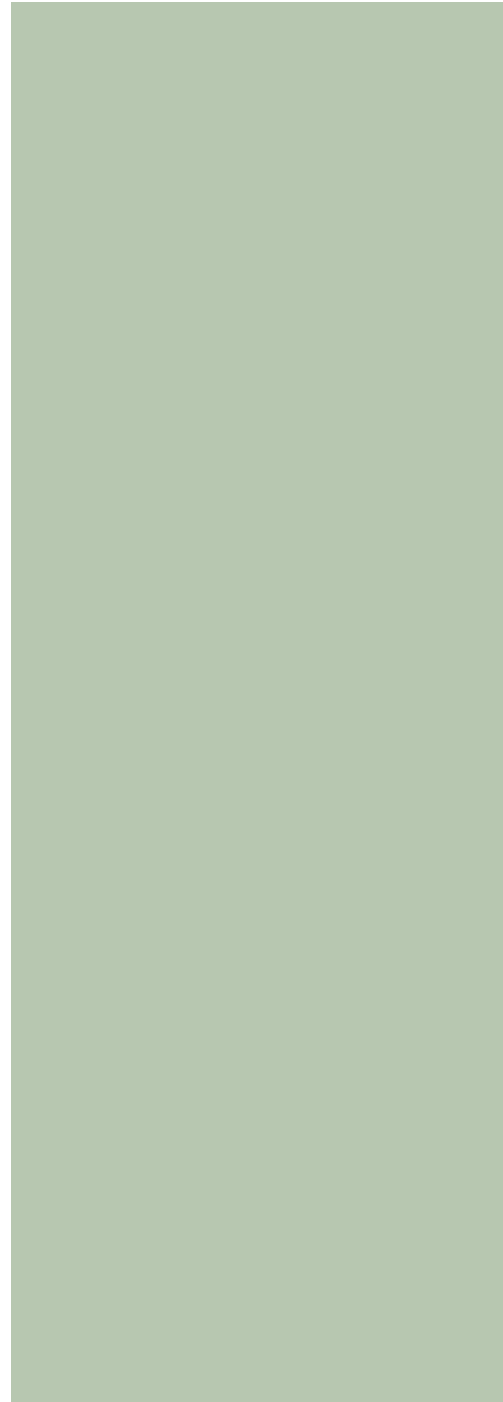
Often the first reaction people have when they hear someone is fasting is “I’m so sorry, it will be over soon”, or “Really you can’t even have a glass of water?”. For Muslims, Ramadan is a great blessing from God, and is a month that all Muslims start preparations for well in advance and even look forward to.





What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic lunar year and is the month of fasting. Fasting is a duty upon all adult and healthy Muslims. One of the main benefits of Ramadan is an increased awareness of God. It is an opportunity for self-purification and reflection and a renewed focus on spirituality; and for compassion for those in need of the necessities of life. Muslims also appreciate the feeling of togetherness shared by family and friends throughout the month. Perhaps the greatest practical benefit is the yearly lesson in self-restraint and discipline that can carry forward to other aspects of a Muslim's life such as work and education.



When is Ramadan and what do Muslims do?

This year Ramadan starts, in most places, on Monday 1st or Tuesday 2nd August 2011. It will last for 29 or 30 days. The start and end of Ramadan is dependent on the sighting of the new moon. During the 29 or 30 days of Ramadan all adult Muslims must do the following:

- Fast -not eat or drink [or smoke, have sexual relations with their spouses] from dawn until sunset
- And they may also:
 - » pray more during the night [possibly sleeping for only 3- 4 hours]
 - » spend more of their day praying or meditating [e.g. reading Qur'an]

It is worth noting that Muslims who may not normally practice their faith outwardly may also increase the practice of their faith during this month.

Muslims fast for three main reasons:

1. *To receive God's mercy:* God promises to forgive sins in this special holy month
2. *Self-reflection:* reflect and remove their worst habits: selfishness, greed, envy, pride, in order to encourage peace, compassion, and humility.
3. *Bond with humanity:* to experience the reality of the majority of people on the planet living below the poverty line, to help them be more appreciative of their blessings.

Ramadan is not only a period of physical restraint but also mental and emotional re-focus: a detox of the mind, body and soul.

Some people like those that are ill, those that are travelling, pregnant and breast feeding women may be exempt [see FAQ's].

It is important to know that fasting is about more than just not eating and drinking. The Prophet Muhammad [peace be upon him] said, "There are many who fast and gain nothing from their fast except hunger and thirst". Muslims must also refrain from things such as verbal abuse, eavesdropping, backbiting, lying and slander as these acts severely reduce the worth of a fast. In essence Muslims must try to be model human beings during their fast with the aim of retaining all of these virtuous qualities thereafter. It is hoped that having performed these acts for a whole month they will become habits for for the rest of the year.

During Ramadan Muslims will awake before dawn for "suhur" [a meal taken just before dawn]. As soon as it is dawn, the person is then considered to be in the state of fasting until sunset. At sunset, most Muslims will break the fast with dates or water. This is called "iftar" [the breaking of the fast] and can be followed by a meal. During Ramadan breaking the fast is an occasion for family, friends and the community to get together.





I manage and/or work with staff that are fasting, what do I need to know?

Fasting in the summer is combined with disturbances in normal sleep pattern that can leave individuals feeling more tired than normal particularly mid afternoon and towards the end of the day. Also, towards the latter part of the day some individuals that are fasting might feel a little light headed.

An agreement to requests for slight adjustments to the working day during Ramadan will be appreciated by Muslim staff members. For example, many Muslims like to finish early so that they can get home in time to end the fast with their families. To be able to finish early they may prefer to start earlier and/or have a shorter lunch break.

It is very considerate to avoid holding events, such as staff meals, away days and get-togethers, during Ramadan. If it is unavoidable please do not be offended if Muslim staff members are unable to participate in such events. If an away day or staff conference is unavoidable, any special arrangements for Muslim staff that are fasting will always be greatly appreciated.

It is not necessary for individuals that are not fasting to abstain from eating or drinking in the presence of Muslims that are fasting. However, during the month of Ramadan it would not be appropriate to require a Muslim staff member who is fasting to join you in taking a client for a business meal for example. When Ramadan occurs in the winter months, it means that it may be necessary for your Muslim staff to break their fasts at work. They may enjoy sitting down together and sharing their food when they end the fast [iftar]. They may also ask non-Muslim staff to participate in this. To fast along with Muslim colleagues, even for part of the day, is a good way of enhancing understanding, and can be used as a wonderful way of fundraising for a charitable cause during the month of Ramadan.

As mentioned previously, many Muslims will endeavour to practice their faith more during Ramadan than they might for the remainder of the year. As a consequence of this more Muslim staff might wish to offer prayers during the day. This will normally be around 1:00 pm and 5:00 pm in the summer months for a few minutes each for which the staff member(s) will require a small private area. If you do not have a designated prayer room at the moment please consider allocating a place where Muslims can pray at ease. If you would like advice on the requirements for a prayer facility at your workplace please email info@workingmuslim.com and we will send you some guidance.





We have Muslim customers, what do I need to know?

Showing your Muslim customers that you know it is Ramadan is likely to please them. Therefore, posting an acknowledgement on your website, in newsletters or simply a notice in your reception area is a good idea. Something like the message below is appropriate.

“Ramadan Mubarak to all our Muslim customers. Best wishes to you and your family for this the holy month of Ramadan. We hope that you find joy, peace and happiness and achieve all your objectives for the month.”

It is not advisable to carry out visits to Muslim customers around the time that they will be preparing to end the fast [iftar]. During summer months this is around 8:30pm onwards as the sun starts to set at 8:53pm in London on the 1st/2nd August 2011, the beginning of Ramadan. As the days get shorter, the fast will end sooner, so towards the end of Ramadan the fast will end around 7:45 pm on 31 August 2011.

It would be considerate to avoid visits very early in morning as many Muslims will stay up late engaging in acts of worship during Ramadan and therefore might prefer to sleep in a bit longer. Major events, in the month of Ramadan, through which you are trying to engage with Muslim clients are likely to be ineffective and are therefore best avoided.

The last ten days and nights of Ramadan are of particular importance and Muslims tend to increase their worship during this period even more.

What happens when Ramadan ends?

The end of Ramadan is marked by the festival of `Id [also spelt Eid] for which some Muslim staff members will wish to take leave from work. The actual day that `Id falls on will depend on when the new moon is sighted. For this reason it might not be possible for the staff member to be very specific about the day he/she would like to be away from work and therefore some flexibility is necessary.





7 Quick tips for employers in Ramadan.

1. Establish when Ramadan is approaching.
2. Try and avoid 'working lunches'.
3. Make allowances for Muslims to take a break at sunset to break their fast and pray.
4. Consider allowing Muslim staff to work a shorter lunch break in return for an earlier finish.
5. If you have a canteen, try and arrange for it [or another space] to be available for people wishing to break their fast with others
6. Do not ask Muslim staff to commit to evening functions or to travel away from home for business.
7. Be prepared for people to take between 1-3 days holiday at the end of Ramadan.

Ramadan FAQ

Who Must Fast?

Fasting is compulsory for those who are mentally and physically fit, past the age of puberty, in a settled situation [not travelling], and are sure fasting is unlikely to cause real physical or mental harm.

Those who are temporarily unable to fast must make up the missed days at another time.

Why does Ramadan begin on a different day each year?

The Islamic calendar follows the lunar cycle which has twenty nine or thirty days only each month, therefore Ramadan begins about eleven days earlier each year. Throughout a Muslim's lifetime, Ramadan will fall both during winter months, when the days are short, and summer months, when the days are long and the fast is more difficult. In this way, the experience of fasting in different seasons is achieved by Muslims living in the northern and southern hemispheres.

How can non-Muslim co-workers and friends help someone who is fasting?

Employers and colleagues can help simply by understanding the significance of Ramadan and by showing a willingness to make minor allowances for its physical demands. Special consideration can be given to such things as requests for vacation time, the need for flexible early morning or evening work schedules. It is also very important that Muslim workers be given time to attend `Id prayers at the end of Ramadan. `Id is as important to Muslims as Christmas is to Christians or Yom Kippur is to Jews.

What happens at the end of Ramadan ?

The end of Ramadan is celebrated by the Festival of `Id al-Fitr [Festival of the end of the month of fasting]. `Id begins with special morning prayers on the first day of Shawwal, the month following Ramadan. When it is established on which day `Id will occur, then Muslim staff may ask for time off.



Any further questions?

If you have any questions relating to this guide please email info@workingmuslim.com and we will do our best to respond. Please note we will only be able to answer questions relating to Working Muslim.

Working Muslim wishes you the best of success during the month of Ramadan.

If you would like a copy of the Employees version of this guide please email info@workingmuslim.com.



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