

# Entrepreneur

## A Fuel Economy

**Entrepreneurs are responding to the fuel crisis with innovative ways to help their employees save.**

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Seeing the strain that astronomical fuel costs are putting on employees, entrepreneurs are offering various types of relief. Giving her employees the option of working a 9/80 flex schedule is one way Kim Long is helping her 20 employees save at the pump.

Echo Media Group, her \$1.5-million Newport Beach, California, PR firm, also boasts gas allowances for each employee, varying in amount based on how far each has to drive. "Gas is an expense that is really eating away at a lot of their incomes," says Long, 43.

Responding to the gas price crisis is important to employers, as the Society for Human Resource Management discovered in its recent survey: Forty-two percent of the survey respondents said they have raised their mileage reimbursement policies to the IRS maximum, and 26 percent now offer a flexible work schedule.

Carefully determine the best options to offer your employees, says David Lewis, president of OperationsInc, an HR outsourcing and consulting firm. Think how a compressed workweek--like a 9/80 or a 4/40--will affect your business before jumping in. Experiment with what works best for your employees.

If you're afraid to start a never-ending entitlement, explain that these changes are in place until the end of the year and that the policies will be revisited in the next fiscal year, says Bruce Clarke, president and CEO of employers' association Capital Associated Industries.

The ability to be flexible during tough times is one benefit of being an entrepreneur. Says Long, "As you make accommodations in your business model to support the economy, you also need to consider how it affects your employees and make accommodations that allow them to thrive."