

Ramadan

The holy month of Ramadan is a time when observant Muslims ask forgiveness for past sins, pray for guidance and seek to purify themselves through self-restraint and good deeds. Ramadan traditionally begins with the sighting of the new moon that marks the start of the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. The Eid al-Fitr, Arabic for “Festival of the Breaking of the Fast,” marks the end of Ramadan, and is traditionally celebrated after a confirmed sighting of the following new moon. (Note: because the new moon may be sighted earlier or later in specific locations, it can be difficult to decisively pinpoint the dates of Ramadan and the Eid based on U.S. calendars.)

Unlike Christmas, which Western Christians and many Eastern Orthodox Christians always celebrate on December 25, or Chanukah, which usually falls near or in December, Ramadan can occur any time of year. Managers should therefore be alert and check its dates each year. In 2021, Ramadan falls from the evening of April 12th to May 11th.

Eid-Al-Fitr

The close of Ramadan, the holiday of Eid-al-Fitr, also falls at a different time each year. It is important to note that the duration of the Eid celebration can vary by location. For instance, many Muslims in the U.S. celebrate the Eid for one day. In Turkey, however, all government offices and schools are closed for three days in observance of the Eid. This year in the U.S., some Muslims will celebrate Eid-al-Fitr starting on the morning of May 12th. Many Muslims may request some time off to celebrate Eid-al-Fitr and break their month of daily fasting with family and friends. It is important to ask whether, how and when your employees personally celebrate the Eid, and to be aware of each year’s dates so that you can anticipate your employees’ scheduling needs.

Fasting

Fasting is one of the most important practices when observing Ramadan. Each day during Ramadan, the fast begins just before dawn and ends at sunset. During that period, neither food nor drink is consumed. The time when the fast ends is known as ‘Iftar.’ If a Muslim employee is observing Ramadan and scheduled to work through sunset, it is important to be aware of his or her need for a break to end the fast. When Ramadan falls in summer months, both the daylight hours and the fast are longer than in the shorter days of winter.

Scheduling

It is critically important to take fasting into account when scheduling business-related luncheons or office parties. Invite your employees to share about how they personally observe Ramadan and what practices should be respected during the 30 days. Depending on how they answer, you may wish to consider letting them adjust their hours to start the day earlier.

Prayer

A majority of Muslims believe that prayer should ideally be performed five times daily. The month of Ramadan is a time when many Muslims may decide to improve and excel in meeting their prayer obligations. If these practices will result in additional break-taking throughout the day, it is important to have that discussion prior to the start of Ramadan.

Greetings

If you would like to recognize Ramadan with your colleagues and friends, you can also greet them by saying “Ramadan Mubarak,” which can be translated to mean “blessed Ramadan” or “happy Ramadan,” or “Ramadan Kareem, which means “generous Ramadan.” To recognize the Eid with colleagues or friends, you can say, “Eid Mubarak,” which means “blessed Eid.”

Change in Religiosity

It is important to keep in mind that Muslim employees may outwardly increase the practice of their faith during Ramadan. Many Muslims use Ramadan as a time to refocus their faith, practice restraint and self-discipline and reflect both on God and on other humans who experience poverty and starvation year-round. In addition to fasting, Muslims are meant to avoid participating in negative activities like lying or eavesdropping. Since Muslims are meant to cultivate virtuous qualities throughout Ramadan, this may lead to a change in how Muslims outwardly practice their faith during this month. Invite your employees to share about how they personally observe Ramadan and what practices should be respected during this time.

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