

How does Ramadan work and how can we support colleagues observing this celebration?

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From the 2nd of April 2022, my family along with millions of Muslim families around the world are getting ready to observe Ramadan for another year.

So, how exactly does Ramadan work?

The ninth month of the Islamic year, Ramadan is considered to be the holiest month and while there are different variations on why we observe it, religiously it is to commemorate the revelation of the Quran to Muhammad (a prophet [peace be upon him]). As we follow a lunar calendar, every year sees Ramadan shift 10 days earlier than the year before.

For about 30 days, from sunrise to sunset we are required to fast from food and liquids – yes, even water. But it doesn't just stop there. We are also to abstain from what some might deem as sinful behaviour, such as smoking or cursing, to name a few. There are exemptions to fasting – those who are elderly, ill, pregnant, breastfeeding, and even menstruating.



Growing up in Western Sydney, Ramadan was always something well known in my community; however, this began to change the more I branched out into the world. I recall in my first year of full-time work, feeling so embarrassed and worried by the judgement of those around me – a feeling I still struggle with to this day, if I am honest.

You don't meet many Muslim people in this industry, and it can often be extremely overwhelming without the support of a community. Having to fast all day long, wake up early for Suhoor (the pre-dawn meal we have before the sun rises), do my job, but then also spending mental energy answering questions and educating those around me, left me unsure of how to navigate the month, and too afraid to approach those around me for support.

The older I get however, the more I can establish boundaries when it comes to Ramadan, and if there is some advice I can give to the industry from my experience, it would be this:

1. If one positive thing has come from the past two years, it's the acceleration of the hybrid workplace. For those observing Ramadan, they may need earlier start time/end times or extra breaks for prayers. The same goes between a split between WFH and going into The Office. I suggest checking in with them and working together to build the schedule they may need.
2. Being more cognisant with scheduling meetings, presentations, events and deadlines. It can be a taxing month for some, some may be more productive than others in the morning vs afternoon, and some may want to break their fast on time – try and not clog up the afternoons or place any meetings over Iftar. It's also worth being more mindful when it comes to food centred events and gatherings.
3. Many Muslims will practice differently or not at all – just be respectful when it comes to the decisions they make and how they choose to follow through.
4. Undertake the SBS Inclusion Program to help further your knowledge and understanding!