SHAVUOT IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide
WHAT IS SHAVUOT?

Shavuot is a Jewish holiday that takes place in late spring during the Hebrew calendar month of Sivan. In 2020, Shavuot begins at sunset on Thursday, May 28, and ends at sundown on Saturday, May 30.

What does Shavuot mean, and what does the day commemorate?

The word Shavuot means “weeks.” It celebrates the completion of the seven-week Omer counting period, which is counted from the second night of the festival of Passover and ends with Shavuot. Thus, the holiday is also known as the Festival of Weeks, the Feast of Weeks, or the Feast of the Harvest, originally marking the end of the seven weeks of the Passover barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest.

Shavuot commemorates the Biblical story of Revelations on Mount Sinai in which Moses receives the Ten Commandments from God. Moses then descended and brought the Ten Commandments to the Israelites now that they were freed from slavery in Egypt. The Commandments are the most fundamental laws of the Jewish faith. Therefore, Shavuot is also known as the Festival of the Giving of the Law.

How is Shavuot observed?

According to Jewish custom, no work is permitted on Shavuot. The custom does allow for cooking, baking, transferring fire and carrying objects or equipment. There are many different ways of celebrating the holiday which is observed for one to two days. Observers of the faith may take an annual holiday during this time of the year to refrain from work on Shavuot. Some use this time to revisit the Ten Commandments and reflect on the meaning behind each of the commandments. Many Jewish people read the Book of Ruth and some stay up throughout the night to read the Torah (the five books of Moses). Dairy products, such as cheesecake, or cheese blintzes (thin pancakes containing cheese), are traditionally eaten during Shavuot. Shavuot also celebrates the bikkurim, which is the first fruits that were brought as offerings to the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, making meals out of fruit, including fruit salad.
HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

1. **Get Educated.** Ensure staff who supervise self-identified Jewish colleagues are aware of Shavuot and how they can be supportive.

2. **Intentional Planning.** Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events on Shavuot if possible.

3. **Be Flexible.** Accommodate requests for time off for religious observances. If shift work is the norm, staff may want to swap shifts to observe Shavuot. Look for solutions that suit all parties.

4. **Don’t make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all Jewish colleagues may take the time off, but they may still observe in various ways.