



ARE YOU IN BALANCE!!

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ABSTRACT

[The expression “work-life balance” was first used in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual’s work and personal life. In the United States, this phrase was first used in 1986. As the separation between work and home life has diminished, this concept has become more relevant than ever before. In organizations and on the home front, the challenge of work-life balance is rising to the top of many employers’ and employees’ consciousness. In today’s fast-paced society, human resource professionals seek options to positively impact the bottom line of their companies, improve employee morale, retain employees with valuable company knowledge, and keep pace with workplace trends. This article offers the perspective that human resource professionals can assist their companies to capitalize on these factors by using work-life initiatives to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace.]

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Work-Life Balance: Why we need it?

The challenge of work-life balance is without question one of the most significant struggles faced by modern man. Three factors—global competition, personal lives/family values, and an aging workforce—present challenges that exacerbate work-life balance. In this modern life :

- Stress levels on an ever upward trend.
- People working longer hours than ever.
- An increasing proportion of households with both partners out at work, and where the only parent has to work all hours to make ends meet.

Does it have to be like that? Leaving aside the question of redistributing wealth - which seems to be on no major party's agenda - the solution has to revolve around how we organise our working lives. And the first step is recognising that the answer is "No, it doesn't have to be like that" - if employers and employees are willing to be flexible. Research suggests that forward-thinking human resource professionals seeking innovative ways to augment their organization's competitive advantage in the marketplace may find that work/life balance challenges offer a win-win solution.

Using the xQ (Execution Quotient) Questionnaire, **Harris Interactive**, the originators of the **Harris Poll**, and Franklin Covey recently polled 23,000 U.S. residents employed full time within key industries and in key functional areas. Some of their most stunning findings are:

- Only 37% said they have a clear understanding of what their organization is trying to achieve and why.
- Only 1 in 5 was enthusiastic about their team's and organization's goals.
- Only 1 in 5 workers said they have a clear "line of sight" between their tasks and their team's and organization's goals.
- Only half were satisfied with the work they have accomplished at the end of the week.
- Only 15% felt that their organization fully enables them to execute key goals.
- Only 15% felt they worked in a high-trust environment.

- Only 17% felt their organization fosters open communication that is respectful of differing opinions and that results in new and better ideas.
- Only 10% felt that their organization holds people accountable for results.
- Only 20% fully trusted the organization they work for.
- Only 13% have high-trust, highly cooperative working relationships with other groups or departments.

Despite all our gains in technology, product innovation and world markets, most people are not thriving in the organizations they work for. They are neither fulfilled nor excited. They are frustrated. They are not clear about where the organization is headed or what its highest priorities are. They are bogged down and distracted. Can we imagine the personal and organizational cost of failing to fully engage the passion, talent and intelligence of the workforce? Can we imagine the waste of time, energy and resources?

Futurists throughout the last century foretold a coming age of leisure, where automation and computing took the strain, liberating us for rich, rewarding and balanced lives. But it has failed to materialize. Instead, those of us in employment work harder and longer. Those of us who don't work live in straitened circumstances, unable to enjoy the enforced leisure and domesticity.

Many experts forecasted that technology would eliminate most household chores and provide people with much more time to enjoy leisure activities; unfortunately, many have decided to ignore this option being "egged on" by a consumerist culture and a political agenda that has "elevated the work ethic to unprecedented heights and thereby reinforced the low value and worth attached to parenting".

Solution & Work-Life benefits

Flexible hours- Arrangements for flexible hours working can be of particular benefits for parents with younger children, who need taking to/from school, or people with other caring requirements. There are a wide range of models of flexible hours arrangement, which allow employees greater or lesser autonomy. Travelling outside of rush hour can take stress out the beginning and end of the day.

Part-time work- For most people, there are times when working full time causes excessive conflict with other life commitments. Part-time work should be an attainable option - without loss of benefits or becoming marginalised in the organisation.

Job share- Job share is a particular type of collective part-time arrangement, where an individual can be assured that the job is being carried out properly by someone else when they are not working. Organisations should look to job-sharing as a means of retaining skilled staff whose skills might otherwise be lost.

Term-time working- Term-time working is a particularly family-friendly policy, and which is suitable for more people than teachers. Many people take their holidays, or unpaid leave, or flex strategic absences around school holidays. It has benefits for both employers and employees to formalize arrangements

Home-based working- In the majority of instances, this is not full-time, but appropriate tasks can be undertaken from home - usually with productivity benefits. It is almost impossible to work effectively *and* care for children *at the same time* - but home based working can make the organization and management of childcare much easier and less stressful. A worker free of parental guilt may be a happier and more motivated worker.

Telecentre working- Alternatively, if employees have the opportunity to work locally, in local office or telecentres, this can help them achieve a more balanced lifestyle.

Parental leave- Parental leave may be advantageous at times other than the birth of a new baby. For a family, paternal leave can be important less for the new born child than for the care of older siblings.

These are not, of course "magic wand" solutions. Particular arrangements have to be put in place to ensure

- the continuity of work
- adequate monitoring and supervision
- good communications with staff operating flexibly

- equitable arrangements for all staff (i.e. not implementing flexible arrangements only for those with families)
- protection of existing rights and benefits.

But on the employer's side, as well as more balanced, motivated and appreciative staff, there are business benefits to be gained from implementing flexible work.

Tips for Better Work-Life Balance

1. Figure out What Really Matters to You in Life
2. Drop Unnecessary Activities
3. Protect Your Private Time
4. Accept Help to Balance Your Life
5. Plan Fun and Relaxation

And the benefits can be felt in 3 areas:

- employees can reduce stress, and become more productive and motivated, and happier, as they achieve a better work-life balance
- companies can boost staff morale, and introduce practices which are more efficient and effective
- socially excluded groups who of necessity have to prioritise home life (e.g. because of caring responsibilities) may gain access to employment opportunities with companies which allow a better balance

Some Examples:-

Younger companies tend to be much more creative in finding ways to keep their employees happy.

- **Google** offers onsite laundry, gyms, car washes and free ski vacations to its employees.
- At **Genentech** employees get a six-week paid sabbatical for every six years of service.

- o At game maker Cranium, the company culture is intricately related to the type of products produced. Family-inclusive parties are held at every major holiday and employees take home 10 free games a year.

Conclusion

The bottom line is, when people are crystal clear about the most important priorities of the organization and team they work with and prioritized their work around those top priorities, not only are they many times more productive, they discover they have the time they need to have a whole life. When people get worked beyond their capacity, companies pay the price." Although some employers feel that workers should reduce their own stress by simplifying their lives and making a better effort to care for their health, most experts feel that the chief responsibility for reducing stress should be management.

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- Tips for better work life balance- By Sherry Rauh, reviewed by Charlotte E. Grayson
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