



## Management Assistance Program

### **IMPROVING THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE DYNAMIC IN THE WORKPLACE:**

Strategies for Managers to Improve Employee Retention and Morale while Maintaining the Focus on Workplace Productivity

#### **GOALS:**

The goal of this module is to provide organizations, managers and employees with an understanding of the importance of the work-life balance as well as techniques for improving individual work-life balance issues so that employees (and managers) can find the balance they need to perform well in the workplace

The specific goals are to help organizations, managers, and employees:

- Understand the importance of a work-life balance in employees.
- Establish company wide programs that support the work-life balance.
- Help individuals recognize their individual role and contribution in creating a positive work-life balance.

#### **OVERVIEW:**

A recent study of more than 50,000 employees from a variety of manufacturing and service organizations found that two out of every five employees are dissatisfied with the balance between their work and personal lives. The lack of balance is due to long work hours, changing demographics, long commutes, and the deterioration of boundaries between work and home, and increased work pressure.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is important for both employers and employees to take steps to improve their work-life balance. A successful work-life balance allows staff members to feel happier, healthier, and more productive, in addition to feeling a stronger team spirit and loyalty to their employer. Employers will likewise experience increased productivity and low turnover rates which, in turn will have a positive effect on the organization's bottom line.

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<sup>1</sup> Hansen, Randall S. "Is your life in balance? Work/Life Balance Quiz.

Organizations that choose to ignore the importance of the work-life balance will endure high-turnover rates, low morale, and unhappy employees. In the competitive marketplace, companies must strive to meet both the extrinsic and the intrinsic needs of their employees, and realize that staffs are becoming increasingly motivated more by company provided programs of assistance than simply more monetary compensation.

### OBJECTIVES:

#### 1. Work-Life Balance: Bottom Line Concepts<sup>2</sup>

According to Jim Bird, CEO of [Worklifebalance.com](http://Worklifebalance.com), "Work life balance is meaningful achievement and enjoyment in everyday life". It is important to make it a point to seek achievement and joy in both your work and personal life each day. Enjoyment means pride, satisfaction, happiness, celebration, and a sense of well-being. For example, you can create your own best work-life balance at work by making sure you not only achieve your work goals but also reflect on the joy of the job and the joy of life every day in the process. If nobody pats you on the back, pat yourself on the back—and help others do the same. In addition, it is important to remember:

- *Work-Life balance does not mean equal balance.* Trying to schedule an equal number of hours for each of your various work and personal activities is usually unrewarding and unrealistic.
- *Your best individual work-life balance will vary over time, often on a daily basis.* The right balance for you today will probably be different for you tomorrow. The right balance for you when you are single will be different for you when you are married or have children.
- *There is no perfect, one-size fits all, balance you should be striving for.* The best work-life balance is different for each of us because we all have different priorities and lives.

#### 2. Work-Life Balance – What Employers Can Do

The primary way companies can help facilitate work-life balance for their employees are through work-life centered programs and trainings. Effective work-life programs help forge a mutually beneficial relationship between an employer and employee. Employees who are better able to balance the demands on their time are more satisfied and content. This in turn leads to real benefits for the employer in terms of productivity gains, lowered

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<sup>2</sup> Bird, Jim. "Work Life Balance Defined – What it really means!" [Worklifebalance.com](http://Worklifebalance.com).

turnover rate, a stronger team spirit and loyalty to employer. Operationally, a lower turnover rate leads to reduction in new employee training costs, as well as the more subtle costs associated with informal training that existing employees provide to new team members.<sup>3</sup>

Company provided programs produce measurable bottom line results. Such initiatives, policies and benefits support individual work-life balance. This allows the workforce to focus better while on the job, because external life issues are made more manageable.<sup>4</sup>

Some common work-life benefits companies can provide their employees:

- **Flextime:** Establish a flextime program where employees can work extra hours during the week to receive a day off every other week, or a half day every week. (Work an extra hour Monday through Thursday and have a half day on Friday). This gives employees an opportunity to have a day off to accomplish personal tasks, spend time with family, or go on vacation for a long weekend.
- **Telecommuting/Working from home:** Give employees the option of working from home, even if just one day a week. With certain technology, employees can link to their company's network from a home computer, to communicate with colleagues via e-mail, phone, teleconference and interactive meetings. This provides employees with a more flexible schedule and allows them to spend less time commuting to work.<sup>5</sup>
- **Provide special working arrangements for employees who are caring for young children or relatives.** Allow staff members with responsibilities for child-rearing or caretaking to work shorter hours, or at hours that are conducive to their particular arrangement.<sup>6</sup>
- **Paternity Leave:** Establish a paternity leave program where an employee can take time off to care for his children.
- **A No-overtime day and lights out policy:** Have a "No Over time Day" once a week and have a regular "lights out" time throughout the office to ensure a healthy home life.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joshi, Sunil, Leichne, John, Melanson, Keith, et al. "Work Life Balance: A Case of Social Responsibility or Competitive Advantage". Georgia Institute of Technology – Human Resources Department, Dr. Parsons.

<sup>4</sup> Worklifebalance.com

<sup>5</sup> Joshi, Sunil, Leichne, John, Melanson, Keith, et al.

<sup>6</sup> "Promoting a Work-Life Balance." [Social Environmental Report 2005.](#)

<sup>7</sup> "Promoting a Work-Life Balance." [Social Environmental Report 2005.](#)

- **Career Development Leave:** Allow employees to take time off to attend college or other training courses that contribute to improvements in their career. Or, allow an employee to cut down their hours to attend school.<sup>8</sup>
- **Vacation:** Give employees an opportunity to earn or buy more vacation time.
- **Allow employees to have their birthday off.** Many organizations give employees the day off on their birthday to enjoy themselves.

Below are additional programs organizations can create to improve the work-life balance—some of these may be more difficult or improbable for smaller companies:

- Have in-house child care/after school programs/ subsidized child care/referral services.
- Utilize an Employee Assistance Program or a Work/Life Benefit Program.
- Offer complimentary gym memberships or corporate discounts.
- Provide in-house stores/services for employees (i.e. dry cleaning service).
- Provide employees with Emergency Back-up Child-Care Services
- Educate employees on FMLA options

It is important to remember that work-life balance is not just for “caregivers”. Everyone needs their personal space, and policies that only benefit parents or “caregivers” might cause antagonism with other colleagues. The organization should provide work life balance opportunities for all employees regardless of their personal situation.

### 3. Individuals

For true work-life balance to occur, employees need to be responsible for adopting certain behaviors which can help them balance work and other parts of their life (e.g. friends, family, self).<sup>9</sup>

During the course of an employee’s work history, there may be situations, opportunities, or extenuating events that change an employee’s commitment or capabilities regarding their work. Such as a death in the immediate family, the need to provide extended care to a sick or elderly parent, the need for extended time due to a move or home related disaster, or the

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<sup>8</sup> “Promoting a Work-Life Balance.” [Social Environmental Report 2005](#).

<sup>9</sup> Joshi, Sunil, Leichne, John, Melanson, Keith, et al.

opportunity to go back to school in the evenings. Just as employers have the responsibility to notify employees of changes in their work responsibilities or work environment; employees likewise have a responsibility to notify their employers of major changes in their responsibilities or commitments in their personal lives that may detract or negatively impact their current levels of work responsibilities.

According to the article, *Work-Life Balance: A Case of Social Responsibility or Competitive Advantage*,

The ideal work-life balance varies from individual to individual and changes for each of us over time. We must regularly find and create for ourselves the balance that makes the most of our opportunities and responsibilities. Meeting our professional and personal expectations requires action and results, and individuals should take ownership for creating value and balance and to assume accountability for their performance and output.

Individuals can take control of improving their work-life balance by reviewing the following tips:<sup>10</sup>

- **Negotiate a change with your current employer.** Progressive employers recognize the value of good employees, and many are willing to find ways to help current employees deal with short-term or permanent changes caused by family situations. The changes can include flextime, job sharing, telecommuting, or part-time employment. Your first step is to research your employer's policies and methods of handling previous requests. Show that you will be a more productive and valuable employee if you can modify your current work situation.
- **Slow Down.** Take steps to stop and enjoy the things and people around you. Schedule more time in between meetings; don't make plans for every evening or every weekend; and find some ways to distance yourself from things that are causing you the most stress.
- **Learn to better manage your time and avoid procrastination.** For many people most of the stress they feel comes from simply being disorganized and procrastinating. Learn to set more realistic goals and deadlines and stick to them!
- **Share the load:** Get your partner or other family members to help you with all your family/personal responsibilities. Taking care of the household, children, or parents should not be the responsibility of just one person. This concept should also be applied to the workplace. If you need help or feel overwhelmed with tasks at work, speak with your manager about disseminating a portion of your work load.

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<sup>10</sup> Hansen, Randall. "10 Tips for Getting Your Work/Life in Balance".

- **Let things go:** Learn to recognize the things that don't really have an impact on your life and allow yourself to let them go. At work, don't "sweat the small stuff," and concentrate on items that are vital to achieving your goals.
- **Set Boundaries:** With the various technological advances and gadgets such as blackberries, people can be contacted 24/7. There is no real end to the work day unless you establish boundaries for yourself and your colleagues. For example, refuse to answer e-mail after 6:30 p.m. every day and on the weekends; shut off your blackberry when you leave work; and do not give out your personal cell phone number. A distinct boundary between work time and personal time is essential if a positive work-life balance is to be achieved.

### **SUMMARY:** 10 Tips for Improving the Work-Life Balance

- Understand that there is no uniform work-life balance system: a person's best individual work-life balance is indicative of his/her needs at the time and will vary depending on their changing circumstances.
- Remember that work/life balance is an active process that occurs as a result of practiced behaviors and attitudes, it is not a single occurrence based on luck or convincing others to come into balance with your objectives and goals.
- Look for work/balance opportunities in your personal and professional life and work with your organization to improve the quality of your working world.
- Set initiatives to improve employees' work-life balance to improve productivity and turnover rates.
- Initiate company programs and policies for that provide employees with flex-time, work from home opportunities, or family or educational leave capabilities.
- Proactive employees should negotiate with their employers about ways to help them deal with short-term or long-term changes in their lives.
- Keep the boundaries between your work life and home life as clear and distinct as possible.
- Practice good time management and organizational skills for enhanced work-life balance
- Avoid procrastination, focus on the important tasks at hand, and share the load (whether at work or at home) with others if possible.
- Treat each employee with respect regarding their boundaries and work/life challenges and understand that they might not fit the "traditional" categories of groups or individuals with balance needs.