

The Art of Work Life Balance

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We are the healthcare industry, engaged in putting the pieces together to make this world a little healthier, a little happier place. In the process, we develop lifestyles that might not be the best for our own health and happiness. What can we, as professionals do and what steps can employers take to ensure a healthy and happy workforce?

How can employers offer better work life balance?

1. Access to Exercise/Pay for Gym Memberships

Promotion of wellness programs by the employer with an onsite gym to back the initiatives up doubles up the commitment to a healthy workforce. Many times, we promise ourselves that we would exercise after work. By the time we get home from working all day, commuting in traffic, and making dinner, it's clear working out isn't happening. Of course, there are some people who enthusiastically workout no matter how long their day has been. But for most of us, having an onsite gym makes it feasible to exercise daily, especially if a coworker acts as a fitness accountability partner as well. Endorphins do help in stress reduction and prevent burnout. Investing on employee health does help in reduction on overall health expenses in long term.

2. Work from Remote/Flexible Hours

I wrote the abstract for this paper before COVID 19 crisis. Now, when I submit the final paper, the world is struggling through the unprecedented crisis and 'Working from Remote' has been a life saver ensuring safety, physical, mental, and emotional health for us and our families.

3. Create Opportunities for Casual Mingling

Making a proactive effort to strengthen relationships within business has a lot of benefits to the employer and employees. From reducing stress to facilitating personal growth, corporate team-building games and social events are a powerful tactic for bringing people together in memorable ways, spark new relationships, create lasting partnerships, and set the tone for future success.

Social events could be anything from a field day to a holiday gala, from watching a baseball game watching to a cooking event, whatever the budget of the employer allows.

4. Offer Good Benefits

Health Insurance, Vacation & Paid Time Off, pension plan, 401k plan, retirement plan, dental Insurance, maternity & paternity Leave, sick days off etc. are the safety net at the back of our minds that keep us going. The topic of work life balance has no value without this safety net.

The 2016 Aflac Workforce Report found that 60% of employees would take a job with lower pay but better benefits, while 16% said they had left a job or turned down a job in the prior 12 months due to the benefits offered. Additionally, 42% of employees said employers making improvements to their benefits would be something positive they could do to keep them in their jobs. Employers that offer strong benefits programs paired with competitive salaries will find it easier to recruit and retain employees.

5. Continuing Education and Learning Opportunities

One of the hardest business expenses to justify when budgeting can be training and education for employees. When a budgetary line item doesn't directly affect your revenue, it can be tough to decide to invest in it. But the benefits are plenty, and that should probably justify it.

- **Increased Productivity and Efficiency:** Better knowledge and skill bring more efficiency. There is time saved and more work done with the right skill and training. It also brings about a ripple effect where efficiencies gained in one area or department can inform and positively affect other business segments. In an ever-evolving business landscape where new technologies are introduced frequently, it pays for current employees to keep up. Instead of hiring new employees, companies can send their workers to training programs to close the gap on the skills they lack.
- **Retention:** Millennials are not pursuing job satisfaction — they are pursuing development. Showing your organization's employees that you are willing to invest in them with continuing education and professional development programs is an effective way to improve employee retention, especially with the generation shift in workforce that we are experiencing.
- **Cross-training and Coverage:** Sometimes there are situations where a task needs to be done by the one person who knows how to do it is out sick or on vacation or has quit the company? Better training programs ensure back up people are available and there are less or no delays in tasks and projects. Cross-training also helps employees move up their career path.
- **Reduced Costs:** Besides increasing productivity, continuing education can also lead to reduced costs through reduced downtime, fewer mistakes that require redone work and less employee turnover.
- **Passion and Purpose:** Think about it, if your employees are set up for success and grow within your organization, they will stay with you. Providing opportunities for your employees to discover their passions and aligning it with their job duties creates purpose. And when every member of your team is aware of their purpose, anything is possible.

6. Mandatory Vacation Policy

It's incredibly good for the mental and physical health of your team members. When seniors have stepped away, it's a good opportunity for members to develop their leadership muscle, to make the decisions and to keep the show running. It's a good way to ensure that your back-up processes are in place and spot potential trouble spots before things go out of control.

7. Gratitude Towards the Employees and Encouragement to do Better.

"Thank you, for bringing in a fresh perspective to this project. Your creative insight never fails our team!".

Imagine receiving emails or hand-written notes like the above. Who does not like being appreciated?

Employees who feel appreciated are more motivated and loyal to their companies. A 2013 Glassdoor Employee Appreciation Survey revealed that 53% of employees would stay at their company longer if they felt more appreciation from their boss, while 81% said they feel motivated to work harder when their boss shows appreciation for their work. Employers who express gratitude towards their employees show that they value employees' efforts and dedication to the company and that ensures better retention.

The simplest way to express gratitude toward employees is to say, "thank you". To add to the ways to express gratitude, employers can hold gratitude meetings, take the team out for lunch/dinner, present hand written thank you notes or cards, give shout -outs, present certificates of appreciation and involving them in important discussions and decisions.

8. Regular Meetings to address any Challenges at work

One on one meetings are a forum for 2-way communication, Supervisor to employee and vice versa. It can address varied topics, feedback about work, any challenges faced, it helps to know your employees better. Your people—like anyone else—rely on the basic human need to feel validated. Face-to-face communication lets them know that their insights and concerns are appreciated and taken into consideration.

The employer is benefitted too because they save a lot of time that is spent on holding ad hoc conversations with the employees, communicating by email, and tracking down crucial information. This brief 1-on-1 communication provides a high-level overview of current issues and progress. These meetings also build team loyalty. You can check in on goals, align on progress and what the next steps would be to attain your goals and employee's goals. You can also provide/discuss strategies and the resources available to make informed, forward-thinking decisions to drive exceptional results.

9. Offer Volunteering Opportunities

The biggest benefit to paid volunteer time—aside from the benefit to those you serve, of course—is likely the impact it can have on your morale as a company employee. There's a sense of pride associated with volunteering as a representative of your company. Grab a group of co-workers and go as a team—you may find you'll work more productively with your colleagues afterwards.

How can employees ensure better work life balance?

1. Set realistic goals and priorities

A lot depends on our concept of an ideal work-life balance. For some of us, to be able to spend time with our families in the evening and have dinner together as a family might be a realistic expectation, while for some going for a vacation every month is a reasonable expectation.

Don't strive for the perfect schedule, strive for a realistic one. Having a realistic frame of mind keeps us grounded and saves us disappointment.

A lot of times, better work life balance means saying 'No' to some things that are not our top priority.

2. Take Time off for Self-Care.

Though it is common for people to take time off from work if they undergo procedures, surgeries, have the flu, or need bed rest for physical needs, it is equally important to take some time off due to mental health needs, even for people who do not have clinically diagnosed depression or anxiety. A day off that is specifically and strategically geared towards self-care can provide stress relief.

Self-care takes a back seat a lot of time and a few hours of doing something that would help you feel better can set you back to track. It could be organizing the house, or getting a massage done, or shopping at the mall, or spend the day with an elderly parent, or spending quality time with kids, or a lunch outing with close friends.

By taking self-care days, you're placing equal value between your mental and emotional well-being and your physical well-being.

3. Exercise and Eat Healthy, Get Enough Sleep

Elaboration on the benefits of exercising and sleep would take another article to be penned down, but exercise, sleep and good nutrition are the most underutilized tools that help build good physical and mental health.

4. Take Short Breaks to Improve Productivity.

Many Americans work overtime, agree to take on extra projects and rarely take a step away from their desk. Taking a proper lunch break is also becoming a thing of the past. This concept of working hard is not effective and is unhealthy too. On the other hand, short breaks during the work day can boost attention, ensuring good performance. An effective break gives psychological detachment, which mentally disengages from work demands that are causing fatigue. One can engage in meditation, a quiet workout, help a colleague, join walking clubs, socialize or just engage in quiet time.

Research has shown that people who take a lunch break are more likely to be satisfied with their job, without their efficiency being compromised upon. Taking short breaks from work is important for recovery – and adequate recovery is critical for top performance.

5. Give Social Media and Technology a Break.

It is okay to unplug sometimes. With the technology to connect to anyone at any time from virtually anywhere, there might not be any time where you are screen-free, unless you create it. Make a conscious decision to give yourself a break from texting, calls, video games, TV, emails, social media or browsing in general. You will be surprised how much time you can create for yourself that way.

Cutting ties with the outside world from time to time, even if it is for a short duration, allows us to recover and gives us space for other thoughts and ideas to emerge.

6. Take Advantage of your Options.

Ask your employer about flex hours, a compressed workweek, job sharing, telecommuting or other scheduling flexibility. The more control you have over your hours, the less stressed you're likely to be

7. Set Boundaries and Work Hours.

Learning to say no is easier said than done. Whether it's a co-worker asking you to spearhead an extra project or your child's teacher asking you to chaperone a class trip, remember that it's OK to respectfully say no. When you quit accepting tasks out of guilt or a false sense of obligation, you'll have more time for activities that are meaningful to you.

8. Ask for Help

Many times, we are reluctant to ask for help at work as it might project us as incapable. We might not know how to do something, or maybe we are swamped with work, or we just need a reassurance regarding what we have done is right. Reluctance to ask for help limits us. When you next find yourself in need of help, remember that people are willing to give it much often than not. Few will think less of you for needing assistance. And when you ask for help, you make someone feel good about themselves.

9. Invest in Gadgets That Save Time / Improve Efficiency.

With modern technology and plenty of gadgets in the market, we have the luxury to pick the ones that suit our needs best and help in saving time. Today have the apps that convert a phone to GPS as a family tracking device, a Roomba mopping your floor, the instant pot which does hands free cooking for you, or FIXD devices that plug into your car's dashboard and diagnoses your car's mechanical without the help of your mechanic. Investing in some of the gadgets/devices can help you save time and get work done efficiently.

In short, work-life balance is the state of equilibrium where a person equally prioritizes the demands of one's career and the demands of one's personal life. We all have different goals and different expectations from our lives and work, so my idea of work life balance can be different from yours, but the old saying still holds true for all of us, "Never get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life".
