

The importance of work life balance and how employers can improve it

Despite what some Millennials and members of Gen Z believe, work-life balance is far from a new concept. Decades of employees have been trying to find the best ways to merge their personal and professional lives to obtain satisfaction in both spheres.

Back in the 1980s when the term first gained popularity, people often envisioned good work-life balance as a scale. Keeping the two sides even was the goal. But such equilibrium proved hard to maintain consistently. One area or the other often demanded extra attention, and tipping in that direction resulted in anxiety or guilt.

A variety of replacement terms evolved to try to better describe what work-life balance means — work-life rhythm, work-life blender, and work-life integration, to name a few. These labels reflect the notion that one's personal life and work duties exist together. Job satisfaction and individual well-being depend on creating a suitable mixture.

It begs to wonder, then, that if people have been considering the importance of work-life balance for so long, why does the topic suddenly seem so new?

The COVID-19 pandemic and the quest for better work-life balance

Like several modern issues, renewed momentum for creating a healthy work-life balance sprang from the pandemic. While perhaps skeptical at first about working from home, many employees found that they could perform just as well (or better). They also discovered a variety of positives about telecommuting.

Ditching the daily commute meant more free time with loved ones. Greater control over their work hours maximized their most productive periods and provided flexibility to attend to family members as needed. If such improvements could go on because the pandemic deemed working from home necessary, why couldn't they continue when the crisis ended?

The seriousness of the pandemic also led to increased introspection. Prioritizing took on new importance. How does one truly want to spend personal time? What toll do long hours at the office take on physical health, mental health, and family life? Is it time to set boundaries and put well-being at the forefront?

A new mindset emerged among workers: There are better options than reverting back to business as usual. We demand employers take employee work-life balance seriously.

The importance of work-life balance to employers

Where do employers fit into all of this? Many have promoted work-life balance for years with actions such as encouraging workers to take earned vacation time or allowing them time off at day's end to catch their child's soccer game. While such measures help, the current movement — sometimes called life-work balance to draw attention to which aspect should come first — calls for organizations to actively prioritize harmony between

personal and professional spheres.

Workers want choices as to their work environment and the schedule of their workday and workweek. They want PTO to attend to their mental well-being. Better yet, they want to get rid of the conditions that lead to burnout in the first place.

While anything that is top of mind for employees should likewise be a concern for employers, a variety of other reasons exist why companies should take work-life balance seriously. Consider these three ways employee well-being and organizational well-being are linked:

Attention to work-life balance aids in hiring and retention efforts

Between ongoing labor shortages and the effects of The Great Resignation, businesses require every advantage possible to attract job seekers and keep current staff. Flexible work policies and other actions that contribute to work-life balance are a big draw.

Many modern job seekers have the luxury of being choosy and are taking the time to identify employers that mesh with their lifestyle needs. According to [LinkedIn Global Talent Trends 2022](#), job hunters viewed nearly twice as many job posts before applying in 2021 than they did in 2019. And, ads touting [remote or hybrid work](#) are attracting seven times more applicants than in-person roles. Likewise, the LinkedIn report notes that 63 percent of professionals pick work-life balance as a top priority when selecting a new job — even beating out compensation.

Plainly put, if your company does not recognize the importance of work-life balance, people will go elsewhere. Game rooms and unlimited snacks no longer cut it when what workers truly want is a new way of mixing work and personal time.

Poor work-life balance contributes to absenteeism and presenteeism

Companies depend on their human capital to provide the actions necessary for sufficient output and continued growth. Workers who cannot perform up to par because of physical or mental ailments or who must take time off to recoup from burnout affect your bottom line. Thus, employee health problems are your problems.

According to the American Psychological Association, [problems associated with chronic stress](#) may include:

- Muscle tension, aches, and pain
- Headaches
- Digestive issues
- Higher risk for heart attacks, hypertension, and strokes
- A weaker immune system
- Depression

- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Fatigue

A better work-life balance helps with stress management. It enables time to eat right, exercise, recharge, and get a good night's sleep. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, individuals gain a sense of calmness and control. They avoid the health issues that lead to sick days, and employee engagement improves because they can concentrate on work-related activities instead of worrying about juggling them with personal obligations.

Work-life balance influences productivity and morale

At first glance, it may seem companies that prize burning the midnight oil would obtain a leg up on output. The problem becomes, however, that this type of existence rarely can last without repercussions. Employees who feel they are neglecting other important areas of their lives experience stress and unhappiness. They lack the motivation as well as the physical and mental energy necessary for outstanding performance. They may turn to [quiet quitting](#) as a way of trying to regain some control.

Striking a good work-life balance leads to greater happiness, and this feeling can make a big difference in the work environment. According to [Forbes](#), research shows that happiness makes people about 12 percent more productive. Also, stock prices at companies with high morale grow at significantly higher rates than their low and medium morale counterparts. And on the flip side, it is worth noting that 60-80 percent of workplace accidents are attributed to stress. (That's not even mentioning all the typos, miscalculations, and other mistakes caused by human error due to burnout.) Fatigue, lack of concentration, and pressure to do more undoubtedly come into play.

What employers can do to enhance work-life balance

Interested in taking action to promote work-life balance among your staff? The following moves can make a significant impact:

Offer flexible work options

Employees crave choice over where and when they work. Telecommuting, hybrid arrangements, and flexible scheduling maximize opportunities to blend job duties with other responsibilities and desires.

Obviously, the nature of your industry impacts what you can do, but try thinking outside of the box. Flextime, for instance, could allow a worker to regularly stagger her arrival and departure times to better accommodate childcare needs. Or, you may find enthusiasm for a compressed schedule where individuals work more hours each day but fewer days per week.

Respect downtime

The good news: technology makes working from anywhere at any time possible. The bad news: technology makes working from anywhere at any time possible. Instead of truly separating oneself from a job during non-work hours, employees still can feel "on," especially if their bosses email, text, or phone during that time.

Help them to relax and recharge by limiting contact at off hours to only emergency situations. After using that time to pursue a hobby, interact with family members, or simply veg out in front of the TV, workers return to

professional duties with renewed vigor.

Judge on results, not hours clocked

Shun the assumption that workers who put in more hours are doing more work. Rather, look for quality over quantity. People should not feel that they must come in on Saturday mornings if they want to move up the ranks or answer emails at 2:00 a.m. to show their dedication.

Regularly evaluate workloads

Did work-related tasks shift or expand during the pandemic? Or, similarly, have some staff members picked up the slack of job roles you are still trying to fill? If so, it may be time to cast a careful eye on what people have on their plates. Too much going on can significantly affect work-life balance.

Look for signs of burnout

Watch for subtle indications that an employee may be reaching his breaking point. A usually diligent worker might start making careless mistakes or a perennially upbeat team member might start exhibiting negativity or a short fuse. Likewise, people who appear tired, come in looking unkempt, stay quiet during meetings, or seem disinterested in socializing with others may be experiencing difficulty with work-life balance.

Grant PTO and vacation time

Do not make people feel guilty for utilizing benefits they have earned. While you may need to limit the number of people who can take off at once or block out an exceptionally busy period, approve vacation time whenever possible. Likewise, encourage team members to take days off as needed for mental well-being or to attend to family matters. And it should go without saying to reinforce the idea to stay home and take care of oneself when sick!

Pay attention to your own work-life balance

Finally, remember that managers set the tone for their charges. Others will follow your lead when they see you leave the office on time in order to make it home for dinner or take a week off for an out-of-state family reunion. And besides being a good role model, improving your work-life balance can enhance your productivity, mood, and job satisfaction, which you deserve just as much as anyone on staff!