



Work Life Balance - Can Women be Both Sharers and Careers?

KEYWORDS

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An integral part of our lives is our profession. Just as there is responsibility and opportunity in life, our careers are also guided by opportunities and responsibilities. We must ensure that these two factors don't work at cross purposes. Quality of life is something we all covet. Having said this, every profession affects life in general and every profession has a duty towards life.

The point I am trying to make is that balance should guide all our activities, including our professions. A satisfied and motivated work force will act more responsibly, not only towards its professional requirements, but also towards nature in general. One of the many ways to instill this sense of motivation is to put in place the concept of Work Life Balance in the workplace.

Work Life Balance (WLB) is not a new concept. The change in the pattern of work and the concept of the workplace after the industrial revolution in the second half of the 18th century, gave a new dimension to the concept of WLB. As time progressed, nuclear families increased. A later change was the fading away of the "ideal home" in which the earning member's spouse took care of the home. With improved education and employment opportunities today, most homes are ones in which both parents work, because of necessity and the desire to augment incomes.

The need to create congenial conditions in which employees can balance work with their personal needs and desires became a factor that companies had to take note of both to retain them as well as to improve productivity. It was a compulsion that they couldn't afford to ignore. Having realized that, companies started introducing schemes to attract and retain employees and improve their productivity. However it is not easy to find many references to Work-Life Balance policies and issues in India. This is not to discount their existence in the country, but it does indicate its relative unimportance as a strategic business issue in the country. It is indeed hurting to see a majority of Indian companies still wedded to the old style presenters philosophy instead of offering managers opportunities to strike a healthy Work-Life Balance.

WHY WORK LIFE BALANCE IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Today's career women are continually challenged by the demands of full-time work and when the day is done at the office, they carry more of the responsibilities and commitments at home. When I conducted a recent, I discovered that the majority of women are working 40-45 hours per week and 53% of the respondents report that they are struggling to achieve work/life balance.

Women report that their lives are a juggling act that includes multiple responsibilities at work, heavy meeting schedules, business trips, on top of managing the daily routine responsibilities of life and home. "Successfully achieving work/life balance will ultimately create a more satisfied workforce that contributes to productivity and success in the workplace."

When viewers were asked about their job requirements

- 14 percent responded that their job was perfect.
- 20 percent stated that their job was too demanding.
- 43 percent said that they thrive when they have a lot to do.
- 24 percent responded they are working too hard.

EMPLOYERS' ROLE IN WORK LIFE BALANCE

In surveys conducted, it was found that an overwhelming majority of employers support the concept of WLB. In fact it has become a legal necessity where the concept of "Equal Opportunity Employer" is almost mandatory. On the other hand, as brought out in the preceding parts of this paper it is seen as a business compulsion for them in terms of retention of talent and productivity in all sectors of the industry. In a time when attrition is a major concern in all sectors, they feel it wise to adopt worker friendly practices.

Employers can facilitate WLB with many schemes that can attract employees and satisfy their needs. Some of these are:

- Facilities for child care
- Financial planning services for employees who need them
- Flexi timings
- Work sharing
- Part time employment
- Leave plans, both paid and unpaid to suit employees' needs
- Subsidized food plans
- Insurance plans
- Counseling services for problems like managing work and the home
- Rest rooms, food preparation services
- Jobs with autonomy and flexibility
- Realistic work loads
- Review of work processes to see if the burden on employees can be lightened
- Maintaining dialogue with the employees and considering their suggestions on a continuous basis

TOP 5 STRATEGIES TO STRIKE A BALANCE

1. Budget your time both in and out of the office - Schedule your time efficiently at work. Put yourself on your calendar and take some time for you and your family/friends.
2. Leave work on time at least three days per week - There are times when working late just can't be helped, but schedule your time to leave on time three days per week.
3. Control interruptions and distractions - Stay focused while in the office, and budget your time effectively. Try to schedule a block of time during the day without meetings when you can focus on your tasks with minimal interruptions.
4. Explore the availability of flex-time - Research flex-time options within your organization. If available, it may be a helpful solution.

5. Seize the weekend - Plan your time off as you plan your work week. Schedule activities with family and friends, a weekend trip, or just something fun. Make your time away from work count!

CONCLUSION

For working women, getting caught in the work/life balance trap will continue to be an ongoing challenge. Careful planning and personal effort is the advice from those who have found balance in both career and home life. As one respondent summarized, "Plan, prioritize and schedule as efficiently as possible.... And don't be afraid of hard work!".

Work-life balance is a person's control over the conditions in their workplace. It is accomplished when an individual feels dually satisfied about their personal life and their paid occupation. It mutually benefits the individual, business and society when a person's personal life is balanced with his or her own job. The work-life balance strategy offers a variety of means to reduce stress levels and increase job satisfaction in the employee while enhancing business benefits for the employer.