



WALKING ALONG THE TIGHTROPE OF WORK / LIFE BALANCE



Respecting People. Impacting Business.™


INTRODUCTION

Imagine your job and personal life are each a high-rise building. The only way to get from one building to the other is to walk along a small rope suspended between the two called life. As you walk along the rope, your left side tries to pull you down with family time, social activities, hobbies, and community involvement. Meanwhile, your right side tries to pull you down with deadlines, meetings, overtime, and sudden projects. Every day is a struggle to balance yourself before you fall into a sea of broken promises and stress.

While this scenario seems extreme, the difficulty of finding a balance between doing your job and living your life is something millions of workers struggle with daily. In today's modern workplace, people are working harder and longer without seeing an increase in benefits. Work/life balance is one of the leading causes of stress, and with the advent of the internet and social networking, the line between on-duty and off-duty is quickly blurring.

What can you do to maintain a balance between your job and your free time? Having the ability to identify when and how job duties can pour into normal life, and how to keep that from happening can not only make employees happier, but can make them more productive as well.





DID YOU KNOW?

IMPORTANCE OF WORK/LIFE BALANCE

THE AVERAGE AMERICAN WORKS MORE THAN 45 HOURS EVERY WEEK, 28% MORE THAN WORKERS IN GREAT BRITAIN.¹

56% OF WORKERS DEFINE CAREER SUCCESS AS OBTAINING WORK/LIFE BALANCE.⁴

80% OF AMERICANS ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THEIR JOBS.² 42% OF CANADIANS HAVE MIXED TO HIGHLY UNSATISFIED ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR JOBS.¹⁰

HAVING A FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULE IS EXTREMELY OR VERY IMPORTANT TO 80% OF WORKERS.⁴

NORTH AMERICANS WORK 137 MORE HOURS PER YEAR THAN JAPANESE WORKERS, 260 MORE HOURS PER YEAR THAN BRITISH WORKERS, AND 499 MORE HOURS PER YEAR THAN FRENCH WORKERS.³

88% OF EMPLOYEES SAY THEY HAVE A HARD TIME JUGGLING WORK AND LIFE.⁵

DON'T MESS WITH STRESS

One of the biggest dangers of having an unbalanced work and personal load is chronic stress. Some stress can be good, and humans are designed to experience and react to it. Stress causes the body to subdue certain functions while heightening senses to stay alert and ready to avoid danger. But with chronic stress, nerve chemicals can suppress functions that are needed for immediate survival. Immunity is lowered and digestive, excretory, and reproductive systems stop working normally. Once the threat has passed, other body systems act to restore normal functioning. Problems often occur if the stress response goes on too long, like when the source of stress is constant, or if the response continues after the danger has subsided.

75 TO 90% OF VISITS TO HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS ARE DUE TO STRESS-RELATED CONDITIONS.⁷

Stress can play a part in problems like headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, skin conditions, asthma, arthritis, depression, and anxiety. The stress caused by work/life imbalance not only has adverse affects on your health, but can also impact the workplace. Workplace stress costs U.S. employers an estimated \$300 billion per year in absenteeism, lower productivity, staff turnover, workers' compensation, medical insurance, and other stress-related expenses,⁷ and stress-related absences cost Canadian employers about \$3.5 billion each year.¹¹

43%
**OF ADULTS SUFFER
ADVERSE HEALTH
AFFECTS FROM STRESS.⁶**





TECHNOLOGY ENABLES 78% OF WORKERS TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE WITH THEIR SCHEDULES, YET 70% FEEL TECHNOLOGY BRINGS WORK INTO THEIR PERSONAL LIVES.⁴



CAN TECHNOLOGY SAVE US?

Advancements in technology during the past decade have made accomplishing tasks and communication much faster. The downside; it has made accomplishing tasks and communication faster. Projects are getting completed quicker, but employers are expecting their workers to respond sooner as well.

The increasing competitiveness of the workplace combined with nearly instantaneous social networking technology has made it difficult for workers to switch off job mode in favor of their responsibilities outside of work.

The Value of Vacations

Technology has also made it increasingly more difficult to take vacations that are free from work. The idea of “getting away from it all” is more difficult because of smart phones, tablets, and netbooks. The burden of job duties can now weigh on you no matter where you go, which maintains high levels of stress, often making the vacation pointless.

Unused vacation days are becoming normal in U.S. culture. Americans earn less and take less than half the vacation time that Europeans do and still leave an average of three unused vacation days every year.⁹ Using vacation time seems to be a lost privilege among U.S. workers when in fact, it should be seen as a vital part of retention plans. Vacations are essential to help relax and balance the demands of life.



61%
OF AMERICANS
CHECK EMAIL
WHILE ON VACATION.⁸



HOW DO I BALANCE IT ALL?

Leave Work at Work

Working every night or every weekend can quickly lead to large levels of stress and job burnout. Set priorities for what job duties need to be accomplished that day. Work with a manager or team to determine what has priority, and then finish the shift at a regular time after accomplishing those few high priority items.

It's surprising how much productivity will increase when you focus all your attention on a few important duties rather than trying to accomplish everything on the to-do list.

Take a Vacation – A Real One

Vacations and personal days have also been proven to improve job performance. If you're experiencing imbalance between work and life, job performance will suffer and put more pressure on co-workers and managers to pick up the slack. The physical benefits that come from vacation or personal days can lead to an increased quality of work on the job. When on vacation or taking time off, leave work at the office. It's a time to enjoy getting away from work, so utilize it by not checking email or taking work phone calls. This is easier if you schedule your vacation and do your best to take care of your work prior to your vacation.



Flex

Understanding the culture and expectations of a workplace can help a stressed employee cope with work/life balance. Talk with a manager or someone from the HR department to learn about any flexible scheduling or if there are any shifts at a different time that could better fit with personal responsibilities.

Also, take full advantage of any special programs an employer offers that would allow more personal time. It could be a children's event or volunteer opportunity away from the workplace, but is still employer sponsored. Breaks and lunches should also be taken to their full advantage. They are there for employees and avoiding them to do more work can actually decrease productivity.



CONCLUSION

For many of us, more work leads to more stress and a lower quality of life. It leaves less time to unwind, take care of the home, spend time with loved ones, enjoy hobbies, connect with friends, and generally live a more balanced life. Stress is the number one cause of health problems – mentally and physically. And there are few things that stress us out on a consistent basis like work, especially when it takes away from all of the other things that life has to offer.



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