Best Practices for Work-Life Balance

What you should learn from this article:

- What is work-life balance?
- Why is it a good thing?
- The complications
- Best practices

WHAT IS WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

Achievers defines work-life balance as the feeling of being able to manage multiple responsibilities, in both work and non-work life. There should be harmony between the two domains, with the goal of meeting both work and other commitments. According to Sirgy & Lee (2018), work-life balance involves two parts: "(1) role engagement in multiple roles in work and nonwork life and (2) minimal conflict between work and nonwork roles," (p. 230). Performance should not suffer in one domain because of interference with the other domain.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR ORGANIZATIONS?

An equal work-life balance results in positive outcomes for both work and life. The following outlines some of the positive results of achieving work-life balance (Sirgy & Lee, 2018):

• Increased job satisfaction, commitment, performance, and career development.

• Decreased burnout, turnover, and absenteeism.

• Increased life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, satisfaction with leisure activity, and decreased conflict with other family members.

• Increased work self-esteem/efficacy.

• Increased job engagement.

There cannot simply be work-life balance policies; culture plays a huge role in the effectiveness of work-life balance. Organizations need to go beyond work-life balance policies and institute a culture that supports true balance (Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Parkes & Langford, 2008). If you define culture the way Achievers does, "how you do things at your company – how you communicate, what you prioritize, what gets recognized," then it is critically important that the way you communicate (e.g., remote web conferencing technology), what you prioritize (e.g., funds for childcare and grocery delivery services), and what gets recognized (e.g., quality of output rather than number of hours spent in the office) supports a healthy work-life balance for every employee.

EMOTION AND SKILL TRANSFER FROM WORK TO LIFE

When emotion from one domain affects the other, it is called Affect Spillover. Events or situations that occur in one aspect of life will inevitably affect another. This is evidence that it may be helpful to celebrate positive events at work as those positive feelings can transfer into positive work behaviours. This also means that negative emotion from one domain can leak into the other. This is normal, but important to keep in mind and also highlights the positive influence of wellness initiatives at work.

Role enrichment means that skills developed in one role contribute to the other in a positive way. Think, for example, of time management skills that you developed when taking care of children, and how those skills help you prioritize your work, or perhaps the presentation skills you developed at work made you an unforgettable host for your sister's wedding.

THE COSTS OF REMOTE WORKING/FLEXIBLE WORK

A common way to ensure that employees have work-life balance is by offering flexible work hours or encouraging working from home when needed. Unfortunately, research shows that blurring the lines between work and personal life can have damaging effects on work-life balance, which is surprisingly contrary to the intention. Technology and being "always-on" creates stress which negatively impacts work life (Grant, Wallace, & Spurgeon, 2013). Being always on may also limit your ability to take actual breaks from work (because you are always partly engaged), which is detrimental to your productivity. Scholars have proposed that creating clear boundaries between work and "life" is important for limiting stress and being able to be fully engaged in both roles (Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

BEST PRACTICES TO ENCOURAGE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Work-life balance is vital for employees to do their best work. It isn't always easy ensuring that employees feel like they can accomplish their responsibilities in both domains. The following are some best practices for achieving work-life balance:

- Policies that prioritize work-life balance and flexibility (Parkes & Langford, 2008).
- Initiatives that focus on decreasing stress and emphasize healthy living.
- Having enough employees (Zucker, 2017).
- Listening to your employees – what accommodations do they need in terms of meeting life's responsibilities? Give them autonomy and trust them to complete work.
- Culture that values work-life balance.
    - "An organization can demonstrate how it cares for its employees by not only offering work–life initiatives that are supportive of the employee work–life balance but also embedding values and practices within the organizational culture that make it acceptable for all employees to use the benefits," (Munn, 2013, p. 414).
    - As a leader, you set an example for what is "acceptable." By acknowledging life's priorities, you inadvertently send the message that other employees can do the same (Zucker, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Work-life balance is both the feeling and the ability to manage responsibilities in work and non-work life. There are many positive work outcomes of work-life balance: job satisfaction, commitment, performance, self-esteem, and engagement. It is important to note that flexible work hours and working from home options can help employees balance work and non-work life but can inadvertently result in stress. Reccomend employees set boundaries between these two spaces so that you can fully engage in both roles and decrease stress levels. Best practices for work-life balance include policies to encourage employees' flexible hours, initiatives that promote wellness and decreased stress, listening to employees, and cultivating a culture that accepts that employees have a life outside of work.

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