

Contributing to an Effective Workplace

Business leaders often say that their greatest assets are their employees--people who must juggle their work responsibilities and life obligations. However, some employees reduce their hours, leave their jobs, and sometimes the workforce, because they are forced to choose between their work and personal commitments, such as caring for a child(ren) or an elderly parent.

Employers of choice understand the impact of this on job performance, recruitment, and retention and they work with employees to evaluate stressors and strategically respond with policies, programs, services, and attitudes that foster well-being through the effective management of job duties and personal commitments. But sometimes, it takes communication from employees for an organization to recognize the challenges and potential opportunities for improvement.

So, before you make significant changes to your position or leave the job you love, start a dialog with peers and supervisors to encourage a more effective workplace. Try any, or all, of the following strategies to get others involved:

- **Complete an audit of programs and services in place at your organization that support work/life balance.** This inventory will reinforce what you are doing right and will also reveal potential areas of weakness or gaps in services and is a good place to start a dialogue with managers, and the CEO! Two tools that can help include:
 - The National Work/Life Initiative, Categories of Work-Life Effectiveness - a basic tool that guides you through the audit process. To download the document, go to www.awlp.com/nwli/homepage.jsp.
 - Boston College Center for Work & Family, The Excellence Index - A more detailed assessment tool and useful for organizations just getting started and those that want to assess work/life efforts over time or across departments. To access this index, go to www.bc.edu/cwf and follow the "Standards of Excellence" link.
- **Identify workplace challenges that occur when employees have trouble balancing work duties and personal demands.**
 - The results of employee surveys and interviews are helpful, but supervisors are most likely to "feel the pain," so be sure to ask for their input.
 - Review company data--including turnover and absenteeism rates, recruitment costs, cost of unfilled positions, and productivity indicators--to explore the type and source(s) of challenges.



- Once you've identified specific needs and areas of weakness, rate the "pain" in your organization by answering the following questions: Is the problem localized, widespread, acute, chronic, or a combination of multiple types? Which employee groups are affected? (For example, is it difficult to retain IT professionals or easy to find clerical support?) How is the quality or performance of work affected? (For instance, do preoccupied dispatchers/receptionists negatively influence the efficiency of technicians/professionals?)
- **Prepare to implement solutions.** To address the work/life challenges in your workplace most effectively, make sure you set the stage for success.
 - First, pay attention to your organization's culture. Are there written, or unwritten, policies that stall creativity and block attempts to introduce workplace flexibility?
 - Second, set priorities and analyze the benefits and costs of possible solutions. Consider both the results of your work/life audit and the workplace problems you uncovered. Use that information to craft reasonable solutions and effect sustainable change.
 - Third, incorporate work/life efforts into quality improvement and employee benefits programs. This step will ensure that work/life efforts remain a strategic, vital part of your organization.

When employers and employees work together to creatively address their workplace environment and realize the return(s) from their investment of resources – *everyone wins!*

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