



Work/life: Striking a better balance for you and your team

RETAINING KEY TALENT, INCREASING WORKPLACE DIVERSITY, PROMOTING PRODUCTIVITY AND BOOSTING STAFF SATISFACTION – SUPPORTING A GREATER WORK-LIFE BALANCE BRINGS BENEFITS FOR BOTH BUSINESS AND EMPLOYEES.

BY DEBBIE MARKS



'Work-life balance' – it's a phrase that slips off the tongue in many organisations these days but what does it really mean to the individual and what effect does it have on your team?

My experience is that 'work-life balance' can be a narrow phrase. Life is more like a recipe; you have your core ingredients and then the flavours and spices that make it unique. Each time you cook the recipe it may differ slightly, much like the weeks, months and years of our lives as our responsibilities, priorities and values shift.

The Australian Work and Life Index 2012 report *The Big Squeeze: Work, home and care in 2012*¹, published by the University of Adelaide's Centre for Work + Life, provides key insights into how Australians are currently handling the competing demands upon them. The report authors' findings include:

- About one quarter of Australian workers surveyed say work frequently interferes with their capacity to engage in other activities and spend time with loved ones.
- Women have higher work-life interference than men, irrespective of whether they work full or part-time, and this has increased considerably over the past six years.
- Most women (more than 60 per cent) feel frequent time pressure, "and nearly half of men (48.3 per cent) also report being often, or almost always, rushed or pressed for time".
- Dissatisfaction amongst full-time female workers has been rising. "If this trend continues next year it will mean full-time women's dissatisfaction with their work-life balance has doubled in five years," the researchers write.

All workers are striving for a better 'lifestyle recipe' but statistically we can see that women really are struggling to balance their personal and professional lives. So how do individuals achieve balance in a world that demands so much, both within the workplace and outside of it? Where being 'time constrained' and focused on getting the job done quickly is more of a priority than enjoying what you do?

Points to consider and tips to help tilt the scales back in the right direction:

- You need to know *what you need* to be a content person in life. What do you want to add to your lifestyle recipe? Is it exercise, greater career challenge, more socialising or family time?
- Create your wish list and take time to analyse your 'ideal life'. Take steps towards it, such as booking your dream holiday or opening a new bank account to start saving for it.
- Be reasonable. Try to work with your manager and your team to achieve your preferred lifestyle recipe.
- Set expectations around your lifestyle recipe and prove that you can make it work without letting down your manager or teammates.

- Be creative when it comes to how your lifestyle recipe can work in your business/organisation. Talk to teammates, see if they have a personal need and perhaps together you can achieve the needs of the team and your personal ones too.

As a business owner, manager or leader with targets, growing demands and an increasing emphasis on work-life balance, how do you manage all these needs? Follow the same process.

Consider:

- What must we do to achieve our targets daily, weekly, monthly and yearly?
- Whose expectations do I have to manage and how do I get the team to buy into it?
- Bringing your team together to discuss what they need for their lifestyle recipe to work. This may offer new ideas for flexibility within the team. For example, those wanting or needing part-time work may realise a colleague has a similar need. Between them and the team they might come up with a solution that allows a parent to do a school pickup once a week but work later, allowing another employee to play sport one afternoon a week without a productivity loss.

In a challenging economic climate, retention of working parents, baby boomers seeking part-time work and those with passions outside of the workplace is critical to achieving organisational goals without losing intellectual capital.

Many organisations are making the move towards a more flexible workplace; considering their employees' work-life balance is a key part of this.

Badly handled discussions around work-life balance often lead to resentment, loss of key talent and a malaise within team and organisations.

Those who embrace work-life discussions openly and are broadminded are paving the way to increased workplace diversity, staff retention and health and wellbeing within Australia.

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¹Skinner, N, Hutchinson, C & Pocock, B, August 2012, *The Big Squeeze: Work, Life and Care in 2012 – The Australian Work and Life Index*, The Centre for Work + Life, University of South Australia.