

The Importance of Work-Life Balance For Your Employees



Work-life balance is the practice of prioritizing both personal and professional tasks. It refers to the level of a person's life when work-related activities are present at home.

As important as this balance is, it can be difficult to have an ideal balance between the two worlds - especially in the days of the pandemic. For some, they find happiness with little to no difference between work and home life.

Even before the COVID-19, work-life balance was a hot-button issue because of technology.

With it, location isn't as important as it used to be work. In the past, it was hard, if not impossible, to take work home.

That made it much easier to balance the two worlds. For some who work remotely, finding that work-life balance becomes more difficult... Pandemic or not.

So, with the lines of work and home increasingly blurring, why is a healthy work-life balance so important?

What is a Healthy Work-Life Balance?

While there's no clear-cut answer in terms of time spent in each area, a healthy work-life balance is one that allows a person to accomplish everything they need to do professionally, while also ensuring they meet all home and family obligations without burnout.

Generational differences affect the definition, too. Baby Boomers experienced hardship at a young age, so they wanted to work hard (which often meant long hours, regardless of what was actually accomplished) to make money and earn a decent living.

They remained loyal to a company for many years, and often work in high-level positions.

Gen X, who grew up with parents working long hours and feeling the effects of not having their caregivers available as often as they'd needed, placed more importance on family time.

They emphasized creating a work-life balance, which means finding jobs that provide options for telecommuting, adequate vacation time, and extended maternity/paternity leave.

Millennials want to find stable employment so they can pay for college (for themselves or their children) but at the same time are dealing with rising housing costs and economic instability.

To keep Millennials happy, employers are adding extra perks like free coffee, game rooms, additional benefits, and other things to improve the work environment.

But, for many millennials, the perks don't matter - it's finding a career path that supports their lifestyle that counts.

No matter what reasons why work-life balance is important to your team, it's important for overall wellness.

The Importance of Work-Life Balance

When people have adequate time and support for their personal life as well as their career, they are happier.

They have more time to focus on their well-being and mental health. This translates to better relationships with their employers and fellow employees, as well as boosts in productivity and performance.

Not only will they get more done, but they'll make fewer mistakes, too.

In today's economy, employers need to focus more time and effort on retention. It is difficult to attract and retain top talent - and the costs of employee turnover often outweigh the salary of the staff being replaced.

For companies to get and keep employees that will keep the business running smoothly and growing, it's critical to build a reputation for supporting and encouraging work-life balance.

Reduce Health Issues

When your team is less stressed, a common result of a poor work-life balance, it increases the potential for health issues.

Employees who are constantly stressed suffer from not just mental health problems, but physical health problems, too. That means you run the risk of higher absenteeism rates.

By supporting a flexible working arrangement with greater control over work hours, you empower your staff to take better care of themselves - limiting health problems and absences.

In a world where employers shoulder a portion of health insurance costs, it makes good financial sense to make an effort to keep your staff happy and healthy.

Boost Employee Engagement

When you make it easier for your team to find a balance between work and home life, you'll end up with higher job satisfaction rates. You'll also have a team that is

more actively engaged whenever they're clocked in, whether they are working from the corporate office or their home.

The higher your employee engagement, the more likely your team members will be loyal to you and your company.

When they're loyal, they'll become advocates for your brand and product. They will be more willing to stay late if there's something that has to be done outside of the normal office hours.

Reduce Burnouts

Stress is a normal part of life. All of us experience it occasionally. But, you can easily avoid workplace burnout.

By taking steps to make sure your team doesn't feel overwhelmed, you can reduce and even prevent burnout.

Improve Mindfulness

When people sustain a healthy work-life balance, it is much easier for them to control attention and focus, which makes them more mindful. When your team is more mindful, they will be dedicated to the tasks at hand.

As a result, you'll see higher retention rates, productivity, and ultimately, profit.

Let go of some control to promote employee work-life balance. You'll reap the benefits of an engaged and productive team.

Ways to Help Employees Achieve a Good Work-Life Balance

Promote Adequate Time Off

You don't have to have an unlimited time-off policy, though companies that have taken that step report that teams don't abuse the option.

Knowing they can take time off when they need it removes a layer of stress, and

they appreciate the job. They enjoy working for the company and thus choose to take time off only when they need it.

As an alternative to an unlimited vacation policy, consider instituting a paid time off policy where your team can earn a certain amount of paid hours for each hour they work.

You can institute a cap to ensure people take the time off. For example, employees can earn 1 hour of PTO for every 20 hours they work, and can only accrue up to 40 hours PTO, so that every 20 weeks, or twice a year, they can take a one-week vacation, without fear of losing income... but if they don't take the time off, they lose it. It won't roll over for the start of the next fiscal or calendar year.

Research has shown that more vacation time leads to a decline in psychological distress.

Require Short Breaks Throughout the Day

If paid time off isn't something your company can afford to offer, at least require your team to take a couple of short breaks throughout the day. Your team will be more likely to actually take the breaks if they are paid.

If there's stress over losing money over a 15-minute break, or that break causing them to have to stay later to make up for the lost wages, they won't likely take the break. Ultimately, this will lead to burnout.

If you have people working face-to-face, consider adding games to your break room so there's something entertaining for employees to use to take their minds off work while they're on break.

Encourage light exercise throughout the day. Every month or every quarter, have meditation experts or massage therapists available to help your team relax and destress.

If you are a remote-only team, consider paying for a subscription to a meditation app like Calm or Headspace for your team, and/or giving them gift certificates they can use for a massage in their local area.

Ask Employees What They Need

If you are not sure of the best way you can support your workforce, talk to them. Ask for suggestions on the ways you can best support them and their needs. If you notice a common pattern, consider adopting a new policy.

Collaborating with your team gives you additional insight into how they think, which will help you develop strategies to work together more effectively in the future.

To facilitate these discussions, implement a regularly scheduled meeting, or build a real-time feedback program that gives you data-driven insights you can use to support your decisions.

Practice What You Preach

If you want your team to follow your lead, then you too, need to be practicing a good work-life balance. Take your breaks. Take your vacation. You didn't sign your life away for this (or any) job.

Do not tell your team to clock out after six and take weekends off, and then send emails during these timeframes. This sends a mixed message to your team. Always lead by example.

Did you know France has a "Right to Disconnect" law? It places limits on the amount of work that can be done outside of work hours.

You don't have to wait for it to become law in your state or country - you can develop a similar policy for your business.

Avoid contacting them outside of their typical workday hours or any time they are not "in the office" even if they work remotely. This gives them time to switch completely out of work mode so they can recharge and relieve stress.

The majority of us will spend a large part of our lives at work - no matter how many jobs we work over the course of our years in the workforce. Because of this, it's easy to let it take over and spill into nearly every aspect of our life.

Keeping this in mind, you should make every effort to find the right balance and institute policies within your organization.

This ensures people can “unplug” from work and give personal lives the attention they need, too.

Universally, there will never be a perfect balance between personal and professional life. What really matters is that you understand what work-life balance means for you and your employees.

Whether this means finding a job that offers a flexible work arrangement where employees determine their own work schedule or offering unlimited PTO, is up to you to discover.

And remember, as an employer, your work-life balance matters, too. No one can pour from an empty cup.

Attitudes about work-life balance will continue to change and adapt as we deal with cultural, economic, and generational change. Don't be afraid to make changes to company culture if you find your team reporting issues with balance or burnout.

Yes, productivity and performance matter and the goal should always be to find ways to improve.

However, making sure your employees have the time they need away from work, is a crucial way to keep employees for the long term, regardless of any general opinions about generational differences.

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