

How to Create Work Life Balance

Americans work a lot. A recent survey by Harvard Business School found that 94 percent of professionals work more than 50 hours per week and over 50 percent work more than 65 hours a week. More and more Americans are trying to achieve the proper work-life balance. They want to work hard, but also want time for: vacationing, hiking, spending time with friends and family and just generally relaxing.

A recent survey of the 1,500 young professionals discovered that work-life balance was more important than wealth and opportunities for leadership. As a business leader, you need to start aligning your business with the changing expectations of the American workforce, especially the younger generation. Millennials see work and time outside work as separate but equally important aspects of a person's life. They are two parts of the same thing.

Beside the need to attract talented young employees, you want productive employees. Studies have shown that employees tend to be more productive when they achieve a work-life balance. Their stress is lower, and employees can focus their attention on work during work hours. Employees who don't do self-care have a harder time focusing on work. They worry too much about their personal lives.

You and your company play an important role in helping employees achieve a work-life balance. Companies must create an environment that lets employees feel comfortable enjoying life outside of work. Employees should be encouraged to plan a vacation or not to reply to emails outside of normal office hours. You need to create policies, procedures and expectations that build an environment for maintaining a work-life balance. A company's culture goes a long way in determining how well employees create a work-life balance.

Here are a few ways for your company to create an environment for work-life balance:

Introduce work-life balance early on— Potential employees need to understand a culture of work-life balance exists in your company early in the process. You should introduce the concept voluntarily during the interview and again during the onboarding process. New and future employees should understand that self-care and personal time are an important part of your company's culture.

Ingrain flexibility – An important aspect of work-life balance is flexibility. Your company should develop a flexible work schedule. Employees who arrive early to the office should be allowed to leave early. Telecommuting must be allowed on a limited basis. Employees can still be productive in a home environment. As long as an employee is working hard, you should give them the opportunity to have some flexibility. Like anything, however, flexibility is a privilege, not a right. Employees need to be made aware that it can be taken away if the system is abused.

Communication – Technology and modern communication tools help create a well-managed

organization. When you communicate effectively with employees through email, phone and project management platforms like Slack, you can clearly convey employee expectations. Employees need to understand what is expected of them to create a sustainable work-life balance.

Saying no is all right – Employees should be empowered to say “no” when the workload is too big. You want to make sure employees don’t feel obligated to take on more and more work until the workload is overbearing. Your employees should take on the amount of work that allows them to produce quality work. When they have too much work, they will do a lot of task adequately but not well.

Training – Employee training is a great way to advance an employee’s career, but it also helps improve work-life balance. Employees can achieve work-life balance when they are better and more productive at their job. Training helps employees learn new skill and allows them to find ways to advance the company.

Let go of perfectionism – Perfectionism is a killer. If you place the never-ending burden of perfectionism on your employees, they will never feel comfortable. They won’t enjoy leaving the office, because nothing ever meets expectations. Your employees should produce quality work, but you can’t place perfectionism like an albatross around their necks. You should praise quality work even when it’s not the best thing they have ever produced.

Unplug – It’s important to let your employees unplug. With today’s mobile devices, you can be connected to the office 24-7. Your employees need to be encouraged to unplug and cut off communications with the office. An email can wait until the morning. It’s better to let your employees enjoy life outside of work. Nothing is that important that it can’t wait a few hours. Employees need to be able to protect their private time.

Encourage wellness– Health and wellness are an important part of work-life balance. You need to encourage employees to stay fit and live a healthy lifestyle. You could offer a free gym membership or give your employees a monthly wellness stipend. The money can be used to purchase exercise equipment or take a yoga class. Your employees will be more productive when they eat right and are in good shape.