

WORK-LIFE BALANCE – THE NEW PARADIGM

By Shrirang S. Abhyankar

Work-life balance has become a by word these days and rightly so. And although people are beginning to realize its importance, it takes two to tango. Hence if only the employees think about it and not the employers then it is end game. We find today that organisations are getting increasingly aware of the business case for work-life balance.

In his book *Managing work-life balance* David Clutterbuck defines work-life balance as:

being aware of different demands on time and energy

having the ability to make choices in the allocation of time and energy

knowing what values to apply to choices
making choices.

Ever since our globalization, the Indian Industry has begun to face the problem of work-life balance. This is specifically true with the boom in the IT, BPO and KPO sectors. Unfortunately this has percolated into the lives of school children, what with the new shift system (a necessity). People have begun to lose their childhood very quickly. They face the pressure of doing better and better in this fiercely competitive world.

There was time when parents spent leisure time with their children – they did not have

to plan it, it just happened. Now they have to find time. We have given it a nice name as well. We call it “quality time”. Imagine making a special note in a diary “on spending time with children”. The pressure of costly living and the advent of materialism has not helped. Women have to work as hard as everyone and are caught in the spiral called “EMI”. What the “busy go getting executive” gains by making that extra money, he loses on his/her health. The life style diseases such as blood pressure, diabetes, heart ailments are becoming 'younger'. It is high time to realize that the body and mind can take only so much and no more. It is almost a fashion to stay back late as if that's the only time real work gets done. This becomes a habit and everyone around such people suffer too. Time spent in the office should be strictly need based. The famous mail which did the rounds, asked a pertinent question – are you “working late” or “staying late”?

Today even commuting has become a work-life balance issue. The time spent commuting could be easily better utilized. The less said about the stress caused during commuting the better.

A lot can be done to solve this major issue. As the saying goes, if there is a will, there is a way. Needless to say the involvement of all concerned is a must. This cannot be an individual show.

Let's look at the some of the things that can be done.

1. Flexible timings

This is not a new concept anymore. Some companies have also started this system. In this system a certain time slot is decided as fixed when all employees need to be present. The remaining working hours can be adjusted individually as long as 40 hours or whatever the office hours have been specified are clocked each week and the team and company work gets done in time. The advantages are as follows

- a. An employee is empowered as he can decide his convenient time and he can still attend to some personal work such as weddings, banks, school etc
- b. It has been found that the meetings are more effective because everyone is aware the time zone for the meetings
- c. It helps in commuting as the rush hour traffic is avoided

2. Telecommuting

It has been in operation in the developed countries. Already some companies in India have started adopting this method especially in software companies where the tasks are well marked out so that an employee needs to come only once or twice a week to the office. The advantages are as follows:

- a. Commuting is reduced
- b. Saves time
- c. Saves on fuel
- d. Contributes to "Global Cooling"
- e. More quality time at home especially with kids

3. Developing a hobby

How many times it has been found that once people retire they have plenty of time on their hands but nothing to do. The reason is that either the person has no hobbies at all or has not developed one. Perhaps he thought he would never need a hobby. A hobby is something which will stand you in good stead, not only now, but even more so during your retirement years. There have been cases people aging very quickly after retirement because without a hobby, there is vacuum, more so in 'empty nest' situation. If someone does not have a hobby then it would be advisable to develop one now. Don't ever forget that we all have to retire at some point of time.

4. Financial planning in advance

Many people over-work for money not knowing how much is enough. It is necessary to sit down and see what you really need, so that one does not 'run after it' and repent later because one ends with a lot of wealth but no health to enjoy it. This entails looking at investment options at the beginning of the career, after considering all the responsibilities to be taken care of.

5. Know your true capacity

Most of us really do not know our capacities. This is applicable both ways. Some people have huge capacities of work and they are not aware of it and vice versa. It is very important to know how much one can do and what one cannot and with it the assertiveness to say NO when they cannot. This penchant of chasing more and more work when one does not have the capacity has direct bearing on the results. Also it can tell on health of the person.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson has rightly said, "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."

6. Looking after your health

Health is wealth. Nothing could be truer than this statement. So looking after your health is of prime importance. Lost health cannot be made by paying more money or attention later. **Health is not the most important thing; it is the only important thing.**

7. Organize

There is a tendency to take many things on our plate and end up creating clutter and chaos. It is necessary to organize one's schedule so that time can be utilized to its maximum. Please remember time is not a renewal source.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe had said, "Many people take no care of their money till they come nearly to the end of it, and others do just the same with their time."

8. Prioritize

It is very essential to prioritize your work for the day. A task may be urgent but is it important? One must be very brutal in deciding what is important to the organization you are working for, what is important for you personally and what can wait. This will help reduce the number of 'bad days at the office' as also help spend good personal time.

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then

starting on the first one." Mark Twain.

Use technology

It is necessary to use technology to help balance professional and personal life. It is true that technology when overdone can be counter productive. For example it is important to know when to turn the cell phone off because it is becoming too intrusive. As Albert Einstein had said "It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity."

9. Don't say yes when you want to say no

A lot has been said about this concept in books and magazines.

We can look forward to following benefits if work-life balance is achieved:

On corporate level

- a. Increased productivity
- b. Possibility of attracting better talent
- c. Better teamwork
- d. Improved morale
- e. Lesser attrition
- f. Goodwill for the organization

On individual level

- a. Reduced stress
- b. Better relationships on the job and in personal life

c. Increased productivity

2. <http://www.worklifebalance.com/>

d. Look forward to nurturing a hobby

3. <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/staff/balance/benefits/>

May we conclude the quote by the great management guru Lily Tomlin that "The trouble with the rat race," once observed, "is that even if you win, you're still a rat."

4. <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/difference/e4wlb.aspx>

References:

5. <http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/health/worklifebalance/worklifeba>

1. http://www.microsoft.com/smallbusiness/resources/management/leadership_training/need_work_life_balance_7_tips.aspx

