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The Irony of Achieving a Work/Life Balance

Many professionals struggle with the notion of balancing a busy career with family life, hobbies or leisure activities. We often refer to this as our “our work life balance.” With major job stress factors like; “doing more with less” identified in article # 1, its no wonder that such a balance is hard to attain. Consider also some interesting statistics from the Families and Work Institute ;*(**FWI**)



Did You Know That

- Workers in the U.S. spend 20% more time on the job now than in 1970.
- 1 in 3 U.S workers report feeling chronically overworked, while 54% report feeling overwhelmed by their workload.
- Of those reporting they are highly overworked, 36% experience high levels of stress as compared to 6% of those reporting low overwork
- The highly overworked group also reports more symptoms of clinical depression, poorer health overall and indicate they are less likely to take care of themselves

Interestingly, the study also focused on the regenerative effects of vacation and leisure and found that more than 1/3 of workers were not planning on using all of their vacation leave and 30% of the overworked group bring their work on vacation anyway.

The Irony of Balancing Family/Leisure with Work

Joan Guric, a Campus Director for The Center for Creative Leadership in Colorado Springs summarized the results of a poll conducted in 2007 regarding work-life balance. ** She explains; “The typical assumption in U.S. culture is that a leader's effectiveness is correlated to the amount of time and energy spent on the job. If that were the case, leaders who are rated with a high balance between work and personal life would receive low marks on performance," says Gurvis. "In fact, the opposite is true."

Their studies found that the leaders who are rated by coworkers as having more balance between work and personal life are seen as significantly more effective by their bosses. The "more effective" leaders have balance scores that are 16 percent higher than less effective leaders.

What are the Obstacles to Attaining Balance?

A survey completed in October of 2007*** by CCL asked leaders to cite specifically what had contributed to a lack of balance in their lives. Of those polled, the number 1 imbalancer was cited as "the pace of my job." This was reported by 55%, up from 49% as compared to their 2005 poll. The second was "too little attention to personal interests and relationships" at 49% and third; "financial pressures and goals" at 32%. Notably, coming in 1 percentile lower (31%) was; "an attempt to fulfill others expectations of me."

Implications for Leaders

1. Examine Your Own Work life Balance and the Influence You Have Over Others

FWI research reveals that employees who are dual or "family centric" versus "work-centric" are healthiest and most successful at work and at home. Having a life outside of work does not detract from work success; rather it appears to enhance it.

CCL research revealed that 39% of employees surveyed feel that "My expectations of an appropriate balance between work and personal life are **aligned with my boss's view.**" Be aware of what you example you set.

2. Be mindful of the importance of time away from the job for you and your workers

The FWI found that employees who do take a higher percentage of vacation days just to relax and enjoy themselves even when they feel overworked on the job, are less likely to return to work feeling overwhelmed. It seems that encouraging employees to take time simply to relax and enjoy themselves enhances the restorative impact of vacation time with benefits to both employees and employers.

3. Seek data via surveys and feedback sessions to identify the most critical aspects of an effective workplace.

The FWI study revealed several critical components for an effective workplace; opportunities to learn on the job, having supervisors who support employees in succeeding, reasonable flexibility to manage work and personal

life, and having input into decisions affecting them. What does your workforce need? Leaders need to think about how they can redesign their workplaces to ensure these and other needs are met.

4. Be Open With Your Teams and Talk About Work life Balance

It is understandable to respond to today's pressures with "more, more more." However, do not forget that people by and large want to do well on the job...and have a life. To the extent you state this, encourage it in others, talk about your own difficulties in managing the balance, and well, be human...will serve you and your team to reach new levels of communication and productivity.

Call me for more information on creating a more effective workplace through your leaders.

Sources

* Over work in America, Families and Work Institute 2005

** Center for Creative Leadership; June 2007 article; The Stress of Leadership, Causing Stress: Demands on Leaders

*** Center for Creative Leadership;_October 2007; article; CCL Poll; Leadership in the Balance

Center for Creative Leadership; September 2007; article; Are Balanced Leaders Better Performers?