

SOURCE LINES

Work – Life Balance: Some Potential Solutions

In our previous issue of **SOURCE LINES** we outlined the problems of poor personal and organizational *work - life balances* (WLB) and stressed that this was a major business issue in the 21st century. Very quickly WLB has joined creativity, profitability, employee mental health, retention & succession planning as a necessary part of today's successful business thinking. And it's here to stay.

The personal strategies for coping with poor WLB are well known to all. In fact they are so well known one can make a joke—"What's the difference between a WLB consultant & a nagging partner?" Answer: "Not much!"

The fact is 95% of people know what they should be doing to look after themselves better. The struggle is to do it. Here are some typical personal strategies:

1. Recognize that balance takes work commitment to working at it.
2. Get organized!
3. Enjoy life - focus on the positive.
4. Get fit - exercise regularly. It fortifies your immune system & is good for your mental health.
5. Find a job you enjoy and that supports your work-life balance priorities.
6. Have a supportive life partner.
7. Keep things in perspective – don't sweat the small stuff.

8. Finally, understand that if you don't look after yourself no one will.

I'm sure there are many more strategies so please share them with your co-workers.

Just like their employees, organizations also need to have their WLB policy house in order. As we stated in our last newsletter, work is a social undertaking. Therefore organizations need to make sure that their WLB policies exist and are clearly understood by all. Inequality with respect to use of WLB policies coupled with little accountability means - great policies on the books - but no one will use these options because everyone knows they are career limiting. Therefore it's logical that few ever use them.

A negative WLB organizational culture informally supports long hours, lots of face-time and corrosive office politics. It can sabotage the best attempts by companies trying to formally help employees' balance their work life. The organization gets caught in the dilemma of talking the talk but not walking the walk!

Thankfully organizations are beginning to recognize the WLB problem. They are forming WLB committees or extending the mandate of their wellness or health & safety committees to explore these WLB topics and look at all viable options. They are heeding the WLB evidence and therefore are likely to avoid the

negative major impacts. Too bad the governments didn't listen to the their electrical experts prior to the August 14/03 blackout or the water experts before Walkerton.

The process of involving all stakeholders and layers of the organization is central to establishing a healthy / sustainable work-life culture. The WLB committees need to be given teeth to make real recommendations to the organization's senior management group and given a real hearing, not treated to the old song, "It's a nice-to-do". Trusting your employee's recommendations is a major statement by the organization. The process of inclusion is the most important asset for an organization, as it and it's employees together figure out what their own WLB policies will look like. Through this kind of a process organizations have: established e-mail truces - attempting to cut the internally generated SPAM; cut the number of meetings employees are required to attend; promoted an atmosphere for free expression of thoughts and ideas, good and bad, right and wrong.

Remember, stress management means having real work - life balance. If you continually work 70 hours a week for years there is no stress workshop, coach or consultant who will be able to help you. Usually the price is personally very high.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, all studies on WLB issues highlight the major influence a positive relationship between the employee and their manager has on individual employee WLB. It is the major reason employees say they have positive WLB. As the old saying goes "employees leave bad managers not companies." Organizations need to pour more resources into helping their managers and supervisors acquire all the people skills they need to do their job since 90% of managing & supervising is about people.

Ideas for Well-being

1. Plan now for the declining health of parents & other elders to avoid stress later. Research available options, talk with family members about their wishes, & share the locations of important information & papers
2. Certain scents, such as lavender, bergamot, marjoram, sandalwood & chamomile, have a calming effect on breathing rate & brain waves. If you have difficulty falling asleep, try putting some lavender oil on a light ring in the room where you watch TV or read prior to going to bed.

**SOURCE LINE, INC., 94 CUMBERLAND STREET, SUITE 604
TORONTO, ONTARIO, M5R 1A3
416-234-1316 / 1-800-394-8015**

**OFFICES IN TORONTO, MISSISSAUGA, WOODBRIDGE AND NEWMARKET
WITH EAP ASSOCIATES ACROSS CANADA**

Email: reachus@sourceline.net

Web Site: www.sourceline.net