



## Work-Life Integration

### A 21st Century Take on Work-Life Balance

The concept of *work-life balance* was introduced in the 1970's as baby boomers struggled to balance their careers, families, friends and hobbies with staying healthy. The idea is to 'balance' your work with your private life. Work-life balance means focusing on your job when at work and making time outside of work to enjoy family and friends, as well as engage in other activities you enjoy.

As technology changes the way some people work, *work-life integration* has emerged as a popular approach. It recognizes that our personal lives affect the way we approach our work and our careers have an impact outside the workplace. Smartphones and Internet connections make it easy to be available 24/7 for work needs, and to have more flexible work schedules. As a result, the line between work and personal lives becomes blurred. For example, you might take time to attend your child's sporting event and then work later (at the end of the day or into the evening). Or, during a vacation or staycation, you allow time to answer emails or for phone meetings.

Integrating work and life can pose new challenges. There are work requirements so those who work at home have to set clear boundaries with family and friends. You won't be able to watch children and care for elderly parents just because you are working from home. It can also

be a challenge to stay present in your primary activity or with the people around you when you multi-task. For example, if it's your night to cook dinner for the family, how do you balance completing dinner and your work for that day?

Whether your job is more suited to a work-life balance or work-life integration approach, one thing is certain: if your work overtakes your life or your personal life interferes with work, you are more likely to experience stress, fatigue, and new or worsening health problems.

#### Seeking Balance

Everyone has stressful times at work when deadlines loom and challenging times at home with the competing demands of a family. At these times, it may make sense to adjust your work hours or ask for some flexible work time to attend to family issues.

Stress is actually good for us, up-to a point: it motivates us to get things done and take on new challenges. But chronic stress weakens our immune system; it can make us feel tired, zap our ability to concentrate, make us irritable or depressed, and interfere with our work and personal relationships. That's when new health problems can creep up or existing medical conditions worsen.

So, what can you do about it? The most important part of managing

#### How's it Working?

We'd love to hear how you juggle your work and personal life in the age of work-life integration. Use the comments section in this posting to share your tricks for keeping the balance.

### Communication is Key

Keeping a healthy work-life balance involves staying in good communication with the important people in your work and personal lives. If you can't seem to ever get caught up at work, talk with your manager about your job responsibilities. S/he should be able to prioritize tasks so you can work smarter and feel a better sense of accomplishment. Read our newsletter about **Working Smart** [here](#).

Communication with your family and friends is important too. Let them know your schedule and things you are excited, and concerned, about. Open and calm conversation can relieve stress and keep everyone in the know.

Also check out our newsletter, **The Path to Emotional Wellness** [here](#).

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stress is recognizing that you are in control of your life! We can't control all the things that happen, but we can control how we react and act. Managing stress means taking charge of your thoughts, your lifestyle and the way you approach problems.

The first step is to understand what your stressors are. The big life stressors like getting married/divorced, moving or changing jobs are easy to identify. Sometimes it's the less obvious things that are hard to spot. Maybe it's regular work deadlines or tense relations with friends, family or co-workers. Or maybe stress is caused by a tendency to procrastinate. Whatever your stressors are, naming them gives you something to problem-solve.

Some stressors in life can be avoided more easily than others. By saying no to things, you can avoid taking on more than you can handle. It helps to know your limits and saying no can help protect them. Another relatively easy fix is to avoid things or people that add to your stress. That doesn't mean ignore problems that need to be addressed, but you can turn off the news if it makes you anxious or limit your time with people who trigger stress. Here are some more tips for restoring your life to a healthier balance.

- Try to reframe problems by looking at them from a positive perspective. Does the traffic jam give you more time to enjoy some music on the radio or to be alone with your thoughts a little longer? If you are upset about something, think of ways to communicate your concerns in a respectful way, rather than bottling them inside or ignoring them.
- Know your work options. If flex-time, a compressed workweek, job sharing, telecommuting or other scheduling flexibilities are available to you, consider if they

could help your situation. If you work at home, be sure to follow home-work policies so you get the job done without distractions from home life.

- Set a balanced schedule that allows time for work and family life, social time with friends and enough downtime to recharge. Take a good look at your responsibilities and set reasonable goals for each day. Keep a to-do list to help you stay on task. Let less essential tasks fall to the bottom of the list or maybe even eliminate them.
- Learn what triggers stress for you and make adjustments as needed to minimize the triggers. If you know you are going to have a difficult meeting or perform a challenging task, plan a relaxing evening after. This will allow time to recover.
- Take care of yourself. Aim to get at least 8 hours of sleep every night and eat a healthy diet (vegetables, fruits, chicken, fish, nuts, healthy oils). Make time for fun and relaxation; maybe take a vacation or staycation. Stay active by exercising for 30 minutes nearly every day.
- Know when to seek professional help. If you can't seem to break the stressful cycle on your own, ask for a helping hand. Many employers offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) as part of their benefits packages. Private counselors, social workers and psychologists can provide short or long-term support. Keep your primary care provider in the loop.

KnovaSolutions can help you keep the balance between work and personal demands too! We are available to assist with all aspects of your mental and physical health. Call us at **800/355-0885**, Monday to Friday, 8 am-8 pm, Mountain Time.