

The Top 5 Reasons for Work-Life Balance

By Joe Robinson

I'm often asked how to make the case for work-life balance to management. How do you persuade decision-makers that supporting staff is an extremely smart thing to do?

The argument is not as tough as it seems, since there are many persuasive arguments to made for the benefits of work-life balance and for solving challenges such as high absenteeism, poor engagement, and low productivity. Weak employee work-life survey scores are a tip-off that it's a good time to broach a work-life initiative.

The good news is that the research clearly shows that work-life balance programs increase productivity, engagement, and profits.

Avoiding the Burnout Treadmill

When times are tough, it's human nature to go into survival mode. We don't think about the future. We don't take care of ourselves. The same thing happens at the organizational level, which can drive counterproductive habits that can trigger the burnout treadmill—just keep going until the paramedics arrive.

That's not a very smart strategy when it comes to productivity or preserving the company's number one asset, its human talent, without which there are no profits or company.

The Chief Productivity Tool

We all know we can't do our best work when we're fatigued or caught up in stress mode. In the knowledge economy, productivity doesn't come from the fear-based decisions of survival mode. Stress undermines intellect and keeps us in a myopic state, unable to think beyond bunker mentality, simply reacting to events.

Productivity is a function of a refreshed and energized brain, the chief productivity tool.

Work-life programs create healthier work practices, more space for responsibilities outside the office, and people who feel they are valued and supported. The research shows that means better performance and attitude.

So let's zero in on the key arguments for work-life balance and the benefits organizations get from a smarter way to work. Here are my top 5 reasons why a sustainable work-life balance program should be more logical than a Vulcan:

1. Work-Life Balance Programs Increase Productivity

When brains are fatigued and hijacked by stress, they get less done. They disengage. Studies show fatigued brains look exactly like ones that are sound asleep. Minds that are focused, organized, and energized get more done in less time. A report by the Corporate Executive Board, which represents 80% of the Fortune 500 companies, found that employees who feel they have good work-life balance work 21% harder than those who don't.

Work-life policies increase effort by giving people the support to work in the most effective way—reducing stress, improving energy, increasing time management skills, improving morale and commitment, and making it easier to handle professional and personal responsibilities.

More job satisfaction leads to more engagement and better results. A Federal

Reserve Bank study found that effective work-life balance increased productivity 10.6%. It doesn't make much sense to leave a 10% increase in productivity on the table.

2. Work-Life Policies Are the Most Cost-Effective Way to Boost Revenues

A natural extension of more productive work is more profitable work. You get more done working more effectively. You also save money with fewer bottlenecks and time sinks. Put them together, and you have a combination that adds value to any organization.

This is why organizations with robust work-life and the highest employee engagement produce triple the shareholder return, according to Hewitt Associates. With that kind of payoff, a work-life program is a small outlay compared to the dividends it generates per employee.

3. Effective Work-Life Practices Are the Best Retention Tool

The Fortune 500-dominated Corporate Executive Board ranks work-life balance as the second most important workplace attribute—only behind compensation—in importance to employees. A number of surveys, including one from Accenture, say work-life balance even tops money and recognition.

A little effort in the direction of something so critical to staff goes a long way to creating loyal, committed people. At firms with the lowest engagement, 40% want to leave. At high-engagement firms, only 10% are thinking of leaving, reports Towers Watson. Deloitte estimates it saved more than \$100 million with an ambitious work-life program that prevented a flock of millennial workers from leaving.

How much easier is it to keep your best people who know how to get the job done than having to find replacements and take the time to get them up to

speed? And cheaper, too. Replacing workers is expensive, from 16% of salary for lower income workers up to 215% of salary for executives.

4. Work-Life Programs Build Engagement

Does your management want people who are auditioning for the next zombie film or who are fully engaged? The Conference Board reports that the most engaged workers are 28% more productive. What difference could that make for your company's bottom line, almost a third more productivity per employee?

There's a lot of talk about engagement, but it can't truly happen without an effective work-life program. The key dimensions of engagement—dedication, vigor, and absorption (that's full attention, or optimal performance)—all come from better work-life strategies, adjusting task practices and motivation in a way that fuels initiative and recognition and gives people a sense they have a stake in every task they do. A sustainable work-life program builds the mental drive and physical energy that are the foundation of engagement.

5. Work-Life Programs Cut Medical Costs and Absenteeism

One of the clearest signals that a work-life program is needed is the level of tension and stress in the office. A highly charged, stressful environment is super-costly for organizations. Highly stressed employees see their doctors 26% more than low-stress individuals and specialists 27% more. U. C. Irvine researcher Peter Schnall calculates the cost of stress-related issues to business each year at \$407 billion, from absenteeism to medical bills and recruiting and training.

Some 50% of employees cite stress as the reason they quit their jobs. Can your company afford that kind of brain drain? On top of that, stress drives absenteeism and medical expenses. High-stress employees rack up 46% higher health costs (Health Advancement Research Organization).

The numbers are compelling, but beyond the digits, there are a host of other reasons why stress undermines productivity and relationships. It destroys attention, undermines the ability to make good decisions, drives conflict, and keeps workplaces in a toxic state of crisis mentality and time urgency.

Work-life balance initiatives should be second nature for anyone who wants to optimize performance and revenues—from better time management to wellness to creating a great recruiting tool. The top five arguments spell it out: Increased productivity, revenue, retention, and engagement, and less stress, burnout, and fewer medical costs.

If you would just like to explore a work- life program for your organization, I would be happy to help you make the case. You can reach out here:

Joe Robinson | Optimal Performance Strategies

Tel: 310-570-6987

Email: joe@worktolive.info

<http://www.worktolive.info>