

Achieving Work-Life Balance

All of our lives have become increasingly demanding and frantic. Work, home, family, friends, hobbies and interests all compete for our time. The concept of achieving a work-life balance is being able to properly prioritise between our career ambitions and our lifestyle preferences.

What is it?

Let's first define what work-life balance is not.

Work-Life Balance does not mean an equal balance. Trying to schedule an equal number of hours for each of your various work and personal activities is usually unrewarding and unrealistic. Life is, and should be, more fluid than that.

Your best individual work-life balance will vary over time. And often on a daily basis. The right balance for you today will probably be different for you tomorrow.

There is no perfect, one-size fits all balance you should be striving for. The best work-life balance is different for each of us because we all have different priorities and different lives.

Finding the right balance between work and the rest of your life can be a challenge. We've pulled together tips to help you make sure you work to live, rather than live to work.

- 1. Be flexible.** More and more employers offer flexible working conditions. If starting earlier in the day or working from home would help, ask your employer if it's possible. They'll benefit from your increased focus and commitment if you're working in a way that suits your personal circumstances.
- 2. Manage your time well.** You might spend 11 hours at work, but if four of them are spent chatting to colleagues, writing personal emails or researching holidays then it's not a productive or healthy situation. Keep a strong focus on work at work, leave on time and use those

extra hours to enjoy life.

- 3. Say no with a smile.** There's no point volunteering for every project if the quality of your work is going to suffer. Saying no firmly but politely shows you've got a clear understanding of your priorities.
- 4. Develop your skills.** Take advantage of any training opportunities available. Developing your skills will help you to do your job faster and more efficiently.
- 5. Take care of yourself.** Remember to keep your energy levels up with a proper lunch break (don't just snack on crisps), go home at a decent hour and never check work emails in bed. If you let your health take a back seat to your job, the quality of your work will go downhill and you'll end up even more stressed.
- 6. Schedule in fun.** This helps stop your work from eating into your personal life. If every Wednesday you want to leave on the dot at five to go to a gym class or meet friends, then make it happen.
- 7. Make work your friend, not your enemy.** Seek out tasks and projects that you particularly enjoy doing. If you let your managers know that you're good at something and enjoy doing it, they're likely to give you more of the same.
- 8. Take regular short breaks.**
- 9. Investigate ways to work smarter not harder/longer.**

Helping yourself

You need to take personal responsibility for your work-life balance. This includes speaking up when work expectations and demands are too much. Employers need to be aware of where the pressures lie in order to address them.

The following are other areas that you need to actively manage:

- Try to 'work smart, not long'. This involves tight prioritisation - allowing yourself a certain amount of time per task - and trying not to get caught up in less productive activities, such as unstructured meetings that tend to take up lots of time.

- Take proper breaks at work, for example by taking at least half an hour for lunch and getting out of the workplace if you can.
- Try to ensure that a line is drawn between work and leisure. If you do need to bring work home try to ensure that you only work in a certain area of your home - and can close the door on it.
- Take seriously the link between work-related stress and mental ill health. Try to reduce stress, for example through exercise, relaxation or hobbies.
- Recognise the importance of protective factors, including exercise, leisure activities and friendships. Try to ensure that these are not sacrificed to working longer hours, or try to ensure that you spend your spare time on these things.
- Watch out for the cumulative effect of working long hours by keeping track of your working hours over a period of weeks or months rather than days. When assessing your work-life balance, include hours spent worrying or thinking about work, as these are a legitimate part of work and a good indicator of work-related stress.

Why is it important to me?

The UK loses 10.4 million working days per year as a result of work-related stress*. Beyond the impact on the economy, the cumulative effect that a poor work-life balance has on the individuals affected is impossible to measure. Those with an unhealthy balance may struggle to develop and progress in a positive way that brings satisfaction and happiness in both their personal and/or professional lives.

IQ believes that maintaining a healthy work-life balance is important for professionals working in the quarrying and minerals products industry. It features on our **Skills Wheel** which captures all the key skill and knowledge areas we believe are vital to successful career development in the industry.

*As quoted on <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/w/work-life-balance>

Where Next?

There are many websites and organisations that can offer advice about work-life balance, mental health and flexible working. A few worth looking at are:

Work-Life Balance: www.worklifebalance.com

Mental Health Foundation: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Personal Effectiveness Factsheets

www.quarrying.org



ACAS: www.acas.org.uk

IQ: Refer to the IQ Factsheet '**Dealing With Stress**' within the Personal Effectiveness segment of the Skills Wheel.

Institute of Quarrying

IQ supports professionals working within the quarrying and minerals products industry through membership and training. These factsheets are produced across a range of topics to share ideas and best practice. Further information can be found via the resources section on the IQ website www.quarrying.org.