

Balancing YOUR WORK AND LIFE

“Research clearly shows that work-life policies have an impact on retention, motivation and productivity, says Gisela Erler.



*By Barbara Perino
and Rebecca Walzak*

Is balancing work and life bunk? Work-Life Balance means having enough time, energy and resources for those things that matter most. The importance of balancing the relationship between work and private life must never be underestimated, particularly as it involves not just the individual, but also his or her family and friends. More and more companies see the value in creating corporate wellness programs, which have become more mainstream and include educating company employees through workshops on balancing work and life, which impacts the importance of managing stress.

Women typically embrace the need to work on balancing their lives more than men, especially those who work and have families. Now Generation X and Generation Y men are asking their employers for guidance, action and tapping flexible-workplace policies designed for working mothers according to the Wall Street Journal entitled “The Daddy Juggle: Work, Life, Family and Chaos.” The article goes on to say that some men are curbing their career goals to spend more time at home. Employers have been slow to recognize men’s role as caregivers and fathers. As a younger generation brings new expectations for fatherhood into the office, they will have to challenge an assumption their female colleagues have faced for years: It is impossible to be both an involved parent and a star performer. Younger generation males are redefining what it means to be a dad. Ellen Galinsky, President of Families and Work Institute shared in the article that the number of U.S. employers taking extra steps to listen to what working dads need is quite small at this point. But their ranks will likely increase especially as young fathers become more assertive in their needs.

In the first part of June, the White House held a summit on working fathers. NPR Code Switch publication said this is another sign of just how much modern fatherhood is changing as the number of stay-at-home dads in the United States has doubled since 1989 and is now around 2.2 million. Pew Research Center found that a quarter of stay-at-home fathers said they choose to stay at home with their children. A similar number said they were at home due to illness and another similar number consisted of fathers with disabilities or who were unable to find work. Fathers who are actively involved in child-rearing regardless of their individual situation are still not a common practice.

Blogger, Richard Doyin became an overnight sensation when he posted a photo online with his blog while on paternity leave from his corporate job. What he thought was an innocuous photo of his interaction and caregiving with his two daughters became an instant hit. While his motive was rather self-serving because he wanted to prove to his skeptical wife that he could do it, the photo was shared by tens of thousands of people and he was inundated with responses from varying perspectives. Some people thought he was one of the “greatest dads.” Other people pointed that the mothers do this every day, and if you saw a woman doing this, it wouldn’t be considered such a worthy endeavor. But there was other responses from people who had their core beliefs shattered – “this guy seems pretty cool, he’s black and loves his kids. What’s going on?” Richard’s wants his conversations through blogs to start from the position that dads like him, black or otherwise are not aberrations. “My issue is that I want it to be a discussion about modern fatherhood where it’s OK for men to behave the way I’m behaving as far as caring for their kids,” he said. “It’s not unusual.”

A study by Boston College for Work & Family found that a majority of fathers (especially those under 40), are moving away from the traditional “breadwinner” role and see themselves as responsible for both the emotional and financial needs of their children.

The study found that “Based on what fathers are telling us, it’s clear that they carry an appreciation of the important role that fatherhood plays in their lives and the lives of their family members.

Companies need to find ways to support all types of family arrangements and provide the flexibility needed to make both the companies and the employees successful.

From our research, we see American men who are striving to be good workers, good fathers, and good men.”

The idea of fathers taking an active role in raising their children is not necessarily new. Older fathers, of which there are many more these days, have always had the opportunity to actively participate in the “fatherhood” experience. Everyone probably knows a man who has or wants more responsibility for their home and children. Take my son-in-law for example. He is a firefighter and because of his schedule he is home on a regular basis. When he first started in this job, he assumed that he should be working a second job, since that is what “men” do. However, it soon became apparent that the best thing he could do for the kids and the family’s financial health was to stop

paying a nanny and take on those responsibilities himself. He does find that many times he will be the only father on play dates or at the daisy scout meeting, but the reward of being more involved with family and community more than compensates for any funny looks.

Of course, there is the fear that reducing time at the office will dead-end careers. Stew Friedman, a management professor and head of Work/Life Integration Project at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School shared that there is a lot of confusion and angst among young men on how they’re going to make it work. There is also a stigma working against men that those who identify themselves as active fathers are unwilling to work hard or put the company first. (Does this sound familiar to our female readers?) Typically men in traditional breadwinner roles are rewarded either because of cultural assumptions or because they are able to put their work first while men who act as caregivers are hurt for doing so.

“Employers still tend to promote people who appear willing to sacrifice everything for their careers,” says Jessica DeGroot, founder of ThirdPath Institute, an organization that advocates better work-life policies. Most current leaders are from the “Baby Boom” generation and rose to the top under the old rules, which shapes their thinking about what it takes to succeed. This is especially true in the mortgage industry where most leaders of companies are typically older Baby Boomers who still lead from the “top down” and resist change. How are these current leaders going to embrace the younger generation of males who “work to live” vs. “live to work”? Obviously this approach will have to change as new, younger leaders, both men and women advance in their careers. “This new breed of leadership will turn down promotions or curb their ambitions without greater support for their parenting roles,” says Brad Harrington of the Boston College Center for Work & Family.

The study at Boston College also found that the more supportive fathers

perceive their work environments to be better overall based on the lower level of work-to-family conflict and the higher the level of work-to-family enrichment they experience because of their attention to balancing their work and families. Ultimately this demonstrates that a more supportive work culture has a positive effect on a father's home life and vice versa.

The changes that are taking place with fathers have not been fully understood and embraced within organizations, and old paradigms persist. Work-life balance continues to be seen

activities such as:

- Flexible working hours
- Flexible place of work (telecommuting, working from home)
- Flexible design of work processes and work content (teams working together, job sharing, job rotation)
- Provision of financial and social support (providing child-care, care arrangements for child and elder-care, child-care bonus allowances, concierge services)
- Qualifications to encourage work-life balance and staff development (through coaching, mentoring, man-

Company who allows salaried U.S. employees to work a reduced schedule. MetLife has a virtual coaching program for expecting parents. Ernst & Young LLP offers a similar program, which was for women only until a female officer suggested offering to men as well. American Express holds occasional Fatherhood Breakfast Series where they invite male colleagues to talk about blending career and family. Google and Zappos have embraced blending work, play and balance into their cultures for years.

The companies who recognize and respect the need of their employees at different stages in life are best positioned and prepared to meet the challenges of the changing world of work. Being out of balance between work and life leads to employees experiencing very specific stressful situations with negative health consequences. Ignoring this can reflect on the success of an employer as well. Companies need to find ways to support all types of family arrangements and provide the flexibility needed to make both the companies and the employees successful. Those that do this will have access to the best talent pool, and potentially a very productive and engaged workplace, even if you happen to be a mortgage company. ❖

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as mainly a women's issue. Fathers are expected to work long hours and to put their work lives ahead of their family lives. Unfortunately there is a deeply ingrained belief that working more hours leads to higher productivity and more effective workers. What it often fails to consider are the costs of added employee stress, lower morale, low job satisfaction and lower employee engagement, which ultimately leads to a decrease in productivity in those extra hours spent at the office instead of at home. Regardless of views on longer work hours and productivity, it is clear that roles of both men and women are changing. Women are taking a larger role at work and will continue to do so. Fathers are taking a larger role at home and that trend will also continue.

Whether you are well established in a positive work-life balance or just interested in getting your company to begin thinking this way there are some ideas available for consideration. The Enterprise-For-Health organization suggests some work-life balance ac-

- Stress management (classes, workplace programs)
- Some companies that have embraced the possibility of this new working place movement include Ford Motor



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rjbWalzak Consulting, Inc. was founded and is led by Rebecca Walzak, a leader in operational risk management programs in all areas of the consumer lending industry. In addition to consulting experience in mortgage banking, student lending and other types of consumer lending, she has hands on practical experience in these organizations as well as having held numerous positions from top to bottom of the consumer lending industry over the past 25 years.

