

September 2012 Edition

From Balancing Work and Family to Reconciling Family, Personal, Professional, and Social Life

During the month of September, we turn the page on summer vacation and start a new chapter: Beginning of the school year, resuming important projects at work, enrolling in social and sports activities, and so on. All this commotion forces the notion of work-life balance to the forefront. Yet, in addressing work-life balance, we must acknowledge that certain societal changes have profoundly affected our daily lives. It is important to look at where we can make adjustments in order to maintain a healthy and fulfilling relationship with work. It is also important to take a step back to identify the roles that work and family play in our lives, and adjust for significant events that may occur: illness in the family, a new baby, or a move.

One definition of the verb “reconcile” is “to bring into harmony”. This has a dynamic and evolving quality. The process of reconciling work and family, therefore, is never really finished. Rather, it is a series of adjustments that periodically need to be revisited. Certain signs, such as feeling that nothing gets completed properly, sleep difficulties, irritability and digestive problems, can be indicators that our state of well-being has changed and that it is time to take action.

Social, Demographic and Economic Changes

Studies show that between 46% and 61% of parents find it difficult to balance work

with family. When this imbalance grows, so do health problems and related signals. For example, an overwhelming work-life conflict is linked with an increase in depression.

Keep in mind some of the reasons behind work-life balance difficulties experienced by so many workers:

- ✓ Faster work pace due to productivity demands in a global market context;
- ✓ More fluid boundaries between work and family life due to increased work-related interactions at any time thanks to smart phones;

- ✓ More complex family dynamics for single parents (Quebec's separation/divorce rate is close to 46%);
- ✓ Sharing family responsibilities is increasingly difficult for families where both spouses work;
- ✓ Growing family responsibilities that now include an aging population and the need to care for the elderly.

Reconciling Family, Personal, Professional and Social Life

The above-mentioned changes shed light on our current reality. But how do we respond to these challenges? Here are some courses of action that can help reconcile not only work with family, but also all aspects of life.

1. Family Life

What type of balance would I like to achieve between meeting family obligations and simply enjoying being with my family? How can I make time for what is important?

Courses of Action

- ✓ Renegotiate task-sharing between parents and with children.
- ✓ Prioritize certain domestic tasks, reducing the amount of time spent on these and accepting that not everything can be perfect.
- ✓ Manage your time at home as you would at work. In other words, set realistic goals and keep an agenda.

2. Personal Life

Are my actions in line with my values? How do I invest in my physical, psychological, and emotional health?

Courses of Action

- ✓ Identify your values, passions, and dreams, and determine how work contributes to these.
- ✓ Clean up – literally and figuratively. Get rid of what is no longer useful and make room for what is close to your heart.

- ✓ Arrange time in your schedule for activities that are good for you.

3. Professional Life

How much time and energy am I willing to invest in work now, given the other areas of my life? How does this affect my long-term journey?

Courses of Action

- ✓ Start and maintain dialogue with your supervisors about work-life issues that may be intensifying.
- ✓ Periodically review your career goals or work habits.
- ✓ Establish criteria for making decisions around things like promotion or change in position.

4. Social Life

What role does my social network play? How can we help one another?

Courses of Action

- ✓ Maintain your network and use it for practical resources (help with housework, homework, caring for the elderly) as well as for emotional support (encouragement, listening).

In Conclusion

One way to reduce work-family conflict is to revise priorities in all aspects of life when important events arise that risk creating instability at work or at home. Your Employee Assistance Program can help you in your search for solutions.

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