



Finding your work-life balance

Work-life balance is, generally, an indicator of good health. Yet, with so many things competing for our attention, most people feel they have too much to do and not enough time to do it.

Finding an effective work-life balance is a co-operative venture involving you, your family and your employer. It allows people to be happier and less distracted at work and at home and to better enjoy their leisure time.

The challenges

In most families today, both parents work outside the home. Homemaking and caregiving responsibilities are often distributed between both men and women.

Canadian families have grown smaller and more and more couples are deferring having children or choosing not to have them at all. Fewer children means, among other things, fewer hands to help out with tasks around the house.

In addition, our population is aging. Because Canadians are living longer, many people who are nearing the traditional retirement age are staying in the workforce. In many cases, these are also people who find themselves caring for elderly parents or other relatives, in addition to their regular work obligations.

Increasingly, employees are also required to take on larger workloads and multiple roles in their jobs. With these factors and pressures, work-life balance can be a challenge.

Steps you can take

Achieving work-life balance isn't an all or nothing arrangement; even if you can't find it all the time, you can still take positive steps in the right direction.

Step one: write down all the roles you're juggling.

Many people aren't aware of how much they're asking of themselves. They don't stop long enough to see the choices they're making or the impact of those choices. Ask yourself:

- Why am I doing this?
- When did I start doing this?
- Did I intend to keep doing this?
- Do I want to continue doing this?

Step two: determine what's most important.

How do you want to live your life? Ensure that you're taking time for personal care and regular physical activity; both

help you stay healthy and provide breaks from your other responsibilities. When you take care of yourself, you have the energy to care for others and be effective at work.

Step three: decide where to spend your time and energy.

Be realistic about how much of yourself you can give. Say no to less important tasks and activities so you can say yes to what you really want or need to do. Decide where you can relax your standards to make your life easier.

Step four: give yourself permission to make changes.

Can you share the workload at home and work more as a team?

Step five: do it, and don't feel guilty.

Achieving balance requires compromise. For example, could you work four days a week and manage on a smaller paycheck in order to have more time at home? Decide what will work best for you and then talk with your employer.

Steps employers can take

Research indicates that employees believe work-life balance challenges to be more significant at work. These challenges include heavy workloads and too many roles, resulting in longer hours and more travel time. Employees see a need for

- developing work-life balance policies that are put into practice;
- supportive managers; and
- employers who do their part to help employees find a better balance.

A work environment that supports work-life balance attracts employees, encourages their retention and promotes greater employee morale. When employees feel supported, they

- perform better;
- feel less stressed and have fewer absences; and
- display more positive attitudes.

Supportive managers reap benefits too. Managers who communicate clearly, care about their employees and offer flexible work hours are usually rewarded with employees who trust them and strive to do their best work. Consider these ways of creating a more supportive work environment:

- Develop and implement supportive policies and ensure that managers implement them fairly.

- Increase employees' sense of control. For example, can you give them more flexibility to decide when and where they work?
- Try to determine the root cause of troublesome workloads. Is the problem unrealistic expectations? Poor planning? Something else?
- Give employees the right to refuse overtime work.
- Provide a limited number of days of paid leave for your employees for child care and elder care or to deal with other personal challenges.

Establishing a work-life balance that works for you can be complex but it's not impossible. The key is co-operation. If

you, your family and your employer work together, you can get there.

Learn more

[Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety \(CCOHS\)](#)

A comprehensive list of resources on work-life balance for employees and employers.

[Canadian Mental Health Association](#)

A brochure on work-life balance for employers.

[When Work Takes Over](#)

Explore the challenges that the demands of technology present, including our ever increasing access to work.

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