

## Help employees balance work and family

The pursuit of a balanced lifestyle is highly relevant to most employees and managers. The concept of balance has received significant attention as more people, often under stress, strive to juggle work and home commitments.

Helping employees balance their work and home life has become an additional expectation of managers who, themselves, are trying to balance their own. The following strategies can provide guidance:

### 1. Keep things in perspective

Life's activities can be broken down into the following categories:

- Fun.
- Family.
- Friends (social life).
- Finances (work).
- Fitness (health).
- Formal and informal education.

Balance is achieved by attending equally to each of these categories. Conversely, when some are emphasised at the expense of others, imbalance occurs, requiring a review of life practices and a return to a more balanced lifestyle.

### 2. Appreciate diversity

Workplaces have become more generational, ethnic and culturally diverse. Veterans, baby boomers, generations X and Y, and people from different multicultural groups contribute to a more heterogeneous and stimulating workplace. Another aspect of that diversity is the concept of "family" that may, or may not, include children. Your attitude and behaviour must respect the choices other people have made.

### 3. Monitor behaviour – yours and others

As a manager, you are likely to be able to help others lead a more balanced lifestyle. You are aware, for example, that people's behaviours have been learnt from their backgrounds, education and by modelling significant others. Some people can be oblivious to the detrimental effects that their behaviour can have on themselves and others. By people-watching in your business, you will realise those who lead a more balanced lifestyle than others and those for whom intervention could help. The ways that you manage these situations will influence your behaviour also.

#### **4. Be flexible**

It's not the amount of time that people spend at work that's important, but how effective they are while they are there. You will find that working hours can become more flexible when your focus is on outcomes. Parents often need this flexibility. Unexpected demands on time are not confined to employees with children. No matter how well an employee has organised their time, something invariably happens to prove them wrong – sick family members, school priorities, medical appointments, professional development activities or other emergencies are some examples of reasons why flexible working hours are worth considering. Show your preparedness to act in the best interests of your proven performers.

#### **5. Look after yourself and set an example for others**

Others can forget that you, too, need help and encouragement to achieve balance in your life. The reality often is that you will be left to your own devices.

#### **6. Accept that there will be emergencies**

Crises happen in everyone's life and workplace. Respond to such crises sensitively. Neither you nor your staff can be expected to leave "the other life" at the door. The way that you respond to helping people cope with their work and domestic crises will help to reduce their levels of stress, promote a workplace where people want to be, and help to build your reputation as one on whom people can rely for help. People need your support, not your judgement. Be prepared to act always in your employees best interests.

#### **7. Don't leave your employees' children on the outer**

Most parents like talking about their children's academic, sporting or musical achievements. If you are a flexible manager, you will contribute to parent-employees' increased participation in their children's activities. When the situation allows it, include invitations for children to attend social functions. Rarely will those employees without children feel left out or neglected.

#### **8. Give people space and trust them**

People need room to move so that they don't feel "fenced in" or "tied down". They are aware of their obligations and will respond positively to your efforts to empower them. Although you may think that you are the only one monitoring attendance, work hours and time on the job, chances are that those involved will be doing that too. People accept that autonomy is aligned with increased responsibility.

#### **Further information**

The following fact sheet provides further information on these issues:

- Leadership – introduction