



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
Mental health for all

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Information for Employers

As a manager or employer, your primary concern is the success of your business or department. Success for most organizations means controlling costs and optimizing performance. That's your bottom line. But have you considered the impact that work/life balance – both for you and your staff – has on that bottom line?

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Burnout costs Canadian business an estimated \$12 billion every year in health claims, lost productivity and absenteeism.

Without good work/life balance, the performance of both employees and employers suffers – productivity drops and rates of absenteeism increase. When work and life are not in balance, you and your staff are working flat out and feeling burned out, but in fact, you're getting less accomplished.

The good news is that the manager or employer has a great deal of influence in encouraging good work/life balance practices. And the benefits are too many to count.

The best thing you can do, for your health and that of your staff, is to model good work/life balance yourself. Don't eat lunch at your desk, restrict overtime hours, limit electronic communication during non-working hours and take your vacation time.

How Balanced Is Your Business?

Asking just a few questions about your organization can give you a good indication of the quality of work/life balance for your employees.

- Do managers receive training about how to support their staff to achieve work/life balance?
- Are your employees familiar with the policies and programs available to help with work/life balance?
- Does your organization provide flexible hours to help employees balance their responsibilities at work and at

home?

- Do your managers encourage staff to stay home with sick children or elderly relatives when necessary?
- Does your organization have a method to track employees' satisfaction with their work/life balance?

The Business Case for Work/Life Balance

Increasingly, managers and employers understand the importance of supporting good work/life balance among their staff. The evidence about the benefits for business is mounting and employers are increasingly implementing practices that help staff maintain a healthy balance between their work and the rest of their lives. And for good reason – one estimate places the cost of a lack of work/life balance at \$12 billion each year.

Of course, employers and managers must be primarily concerned about the health of their business – after all, if the business does not succeed, there may not be a workplace for employees! But the fact is that improving work life balance will improve the success of the business in several critical ways.

Absenteeism

Workers tend to be away from work more frequently when they're stressed. According to the Conference Board of Canada, workers who reported a high degree of stress balancing their work and family life missed 7.2 days of work each year, while those who reported very little stress only missed an average of 3.6 days.

Absenteeism results in lower productivity if work is not completed, or overworked colleagues and potentially, overtime costs to cover for the absent staff member.

Disability Costs

Workers who are stressed may be more susceptible to mental health problems. Statistics Canada found that employees who considered most of their days to be quite a bit or extremely stressful were over 3 times more likely to suffer a major depressive episode, compared with those who reported low levels of general stress.

The cost to employers when staff experience serious mental illness is significant. Disability costs can be up to 12% of a business's overall payroll cost, and mental health claims are the fastest growing category of all disability costs.

Competitiveness in Hiring and Retention of Workers

When employers think about recruiting and retaining workers, they often think first of the competitiveness of the salary and benefits package. These are critical factors, obviously, but more and more, employees are looking for non-financial benefits when choosing a workplace.

According to a US study conducted by Metlife, more than half of today's employees rate work-life balance as a key job selection criterion. This is particularly true of workers between the ages of 21 and 30, who rank work/life balance ahead of financial growth and advancement.

Making a Difference in Your Organization

Once you've decided to promote good work/life balance among your staff, determining the best policies and practices to implement is the next step. If your organization has HR personnel, they will be able to work with you to make your workplace or department more balanced.

There are a number of different ways that managers and employers can have a positive influence on the work/life balance of their employees. Some require policy changes, but others are simply informal practices that you can put into place easily.

Workplace Policies

Implementing HR policies that allow for flexible schedules and tasks are straightforward ways of improving

work/life balance for staff.

- Flexible hours – allowing flexible start and end times
- Telecommuting – facilitating the ability for staff to work from home
- Job sharing – splitting a full-time job with another employee
- Graduated return – gradually building up to a full-time schedule after a leave
- Personal leave –such as time off to care for sick children or relatives

Workplace Benefits

Providing certain key benefits could have a higher cost to implement, but may also pay for themselves in reduced costs associated with work/life balance, such as absenteeism and lower productivity.

- Employment assistance programs (EAP) designed to assist employees with both personal and workplace problems such as stress, marital issues, financial problems or health concerns which lower workplace productivity.
- Assistance with child care, including financial assistance or provision of on-site care
- Allowing employees to volunteer in their communities during work hours

Management Approaches

Even without significant policy changes, there is a great deal that managers and employers can do to improve work/life balance among employees. Simple changes to workplace practices can significantly improve work/life balance for staff.

- Consider eliminating unnecessary meetings or reports
- Communicate expectations clearly to your staff
- Allow staff to control their own priorities as much as possible
- Reduce unnecessary work-related travel
- Provide on-going feedback to staff regarding their performance

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