



Work-Life Balance and Your Corporate Wellness Program



You answer work emails at midnight, and then you wonder why you're so tired throughout the day. You missed a board meeting because the baby has a stomach bug or you had to take your aging father to a doctor's appointment, and you berate yourself for falling behind.

If it feels like the border between your life at work and your life at home has been obliterated and you can't keep up in either domain... welcome to the dilemma of the modern worker.

Your employees are no different. They're trying to juggle everything at once: expectations at work, the demands of family, keeping up with housework, seeing friends—and they feel like they're always letting something drop.

We're all chasing that elusive concept called work-life balance, and it seems as if it's slipping farther and farther away.

What is work-life balance, and why is it so difficult to achieve?

In this ebook, we'll look at the many factors dissolving the barriers between home and office. We'll include some insights from members of the WellRight team and a trusted expert in this field. We'll also introduce a new concept—work-life *integration*—which may offer a path back to a healthy equilibrium for you and your employees.

Finally, we'll offer some pointers for using your corporate wellness program to support your employees as they struggle to stay afloat amid the overwhelming pressure of their lives.

What Is Work-Life Balance?

Definitions of work-life balance vary, but most refer to the demands of life being given equal attention and priority. No single aspect of life dominates, and nothing gets short shrift.

What are these demands? It depends on who you talk to. Age, gender, socioeconomic status—the plates we find ourselves spinning usually depend on who we are and where we are in our lifetime.

[A survey by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) reported that the average American finds time in the day for any combination of the following:



- » Personal care and sleep
- » Leisure (including TV and sports)
- » Work
- » Household activities (such as cleaning)
- » Buying things
- » Eating and drinking
- » Caring for children and other household members
- » Caring for non-household members (such as aging parents)
- » Education
- » Civic and religious activities
- » Phone calls and email
- » Miscellaneous activities

Work-Life Balance Gender Differences?

The conventional concept of women being pulled toward the home and men being pulled toward work may be outdated.

Researchers conducting [a meta-study of 350 work-life studies](#) (involving more than 250,000 participants) found “very little evidence of differences between women and men as far as the level of work-family conflict they report.”

But women may feel more guilt about neglecting household and childcare obligations, the researchers speculate. Conversely, due to stereotypes about masculinity and “breadwinning,” men may be more reluctant to bring up work-family concerns at their jobs.

Work-Life Balance Is Getting Harder. Why?

If you could go back in time and ask a mid-20th-century office worker about their work-life balance, you would probably get some funny looks.

“When I started my career, I’d get in the car in the morning, and I’d go to work. And when I got to work, I was there at work,” says [Mari Ryan](#), CEO and founder of AdvancingWellness, and an expert in workplace well-being. “When I got in the car at the end of the day, and I went home, work stayed at work.”



Ask the average worker today about their work-life balance and prepare for some deep sighs (assuming they have time to listen to your question at all).

According to [an infographic from Family Living Today](#), 66% of full-time employees in the United States do not strongly believe they have work-life balance. And the proof is in how much work consumes their “free” time: 33% of American adults work on an average Saturday, Sunday, or holiday.

A RescueTime analysis of 185 million working hours found that [26% of work is done outside of regular working hours](#).

How did it get this way? Technology, and our relationship to technology, is a primary culprit.



Technology Is Transforming Our Lives

The internet, email, smartphones, chat apps, FaceTime, cloud-based collaborative software, and other modern digital tools have undoubtedly revolutionized our ability to get work done.

These tools have made once-time-consuming tasks simple while enabling instantaneous communication. Waiting for an answer, or even a returned voicemail, has become a thing of the past for many workers.

In fact, your smartphone goes everywhere you go, waits by your bedside overnight, and even accompanies you on runs. It's more than just a handy productivity device. It's a tether to work that may be too demanding to ignore.

According to [a 2019 email usage survey by Adobe](#):

- » 43% of people check their work email outside of normal working hours every few hours.
- » 10% check it every hour.
- » 13% check it multiple times per hour.
- » 10% check it constantly.

[In a LinkedIn survey](#), 59% of workers admitted to checking in with their managers or colleagues at least once a day *while on vacation*.

“In any given moment, it’s really easy to let our attention slide from conversations with the people that we’re supposed to be closest to, and to pick up the phone and launch back into work things, or to have work interrupt us with text messages or calls,” explained Ryan.





Work-Life Expectations Are Changing

As always-connected technology became ubiquitous over the past decade or so, “hustle culture” emerged.

Hustle culture tells us it’s not only possible but preferable to “[rise and grind](#),” to hit the ground running when we wake and to keep up the pace until it’s time to catch a few (but only a few) hours of sleep.

Hustle culture glamorizes stress. It says you’re not really giving it your all unless every minute of your life is jam-packed with productive activities.

The Life of a Hustler

Yoga at 5 a.m., grabbing a bulletproof coffee for breakfast, taking the kids to school, at the office by 7:30 a.m., meetings, a working lunch, taking calls from the treadmill ... all the while answering emails and Slack messages, posting to Twitter, and following the news online.

Then it’s time for the commute, cramming a business audiobook at 2X speed, picking the kids up, tidying up at home, and preparing a Pinterest-worthy meal. After dinner, a call with clients overseas, catching up for tomorrow’s presentation, falling asleep in front of Netflix, and five hours of sleep.

Hustle culture says: Push through the pain! Don’t let fatigue stop you! Do more and look good doing it!



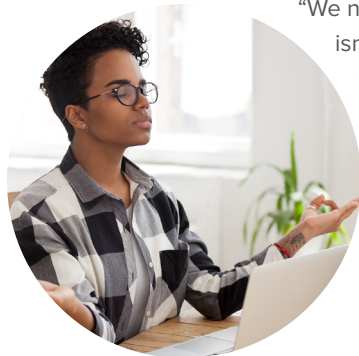
The Hustle Isn't Healthy

Far from “balanced,” hustle culture pushes overload. Hustlers pile more and more on their shoulders and force a smile through it all.

The non-stop pace of hustle culture is a recipe for burnout, a medically defined state of chronic stress that [affects up to 44% of employees](#). Burnout isn't just feeling tired; it can contribute to physical and mental diseases such as heart disease, gastrointestinal problems, type 2 diabetes, depression, and insomnia.

When employees get burned out, they lose interest in their jobs, their productivity plummets, absenteeism increases, and they start hunting for different employment. Burnout is bad for individuals and companies. And so is hustle culture, say [a growing number of experts](#).

Ironically, millennials—the generation most closely associated with hustle culture—are beginning to reject the idea that they have to sacrifice their sleep, their sanity, and their health to achieve personal and professional satisfaction.



“We now have four generations in the workplace, and some of the younger generations are saying, ‘Work isn't the only thing in my life,’” explained Ryan. “The latest generations are putting pressure on employers to help them have the kind of healthy work-life balance they expect, so that the things that are most important to them are the things that are getting addressed.”

Not Balance. Work-Life *Integration*

The work-life balance model implies a strict delineation between each of these activities. This perspective sees work-life balance merely as a scheduling challenge, as if each demand can be neatly slotted into a weekly calendar.

Modern workers know life doesn't work that way. An all-hands-on-deck work emergency can happen on the weekend. A child can text from school because they forgot their backpack. Inspiration can strike at the gym.

The problem with work-life balance is that it is destined to fail. It's like spinning plates. You can't keep them all going forever.

Instead of helping your employees achieve an inevitably unsustainable work-life balance, it may be more beneficial to foster an environment in which your employees have the latitude to manage their own needs.

“Having a flexible work schedule and being able to work from home allows me to be able to save hours on travel and get tasks done that I wouldn't have been able to fit in if I had to be in the office and traveling 1.5 hours each way, like working out, starting dinner, and doing laundry.” —Jenn

Ryan told us she recently led a series of workshops where she asked attendees what they thought would be most important in the workplace of the future. The number-one response: flexibility.

“I think employers really need to think about how they create structures of flexibility,” says Ryan. “People need the flexibility to manage the elements of their lives they deem important.”

Flexibility is the key to **work-life integration**.



Work-life integration is the next step in the evolution of work-life balance. It's a recognition of three modern truths:

- 1) Work and life needn't be in opposition to each other
- 2) The office isn't the only place where work can happen
- 3) Rigid schedules often drive up stress levels and drive down productivity

"[The] traditional image of a scale associated with work/life balance creates a sense of competition between the two elements. Work/Life Integration instead is an approach that creates more synergies between all areas that define 'life' work, home/family, community, personal well-being, and health.



Technological tools have created new ways for us to collaborate and work virtually, bringing with them tailored alternatives for work schedule flexibility." —[Haas School of Business](#)

How Employers Can Promote Work-Life Integration

People, when possible and within reason, need to be free to set their own hours. An employee should be able to leave midday to pick up their kids and finish up work later at home. Or, when they need to take their mother to a doctor's appointment, they should have the option to come in later.

Leadership can foster this in three ways:

1. Encourage and Promote Flexibility

The first step is to put the policies in place that allow for flexible scheduling. This might start with a discussion among management about when it's absolutely necessary for employees to be in the building and when they can be given leeway to work remotely.

(Incidentally, [studies show](#) remote workers are more productive and take less time off than in-house employees.)

Once everyone has bought into flexible scheduling, you'll want to get the word out to your employees. Make it clear that flexibility is not only allowed but encouraged. Tell employees you want them to take care of life's pressing demands when they need to, so they can be focused and fresh at work.

2. Model Flexibility

"One of the big roles that leadership plays is role modeling," emphasizes Ryan. "You can't talk one way and then give a different message through your actions."

Company policy is one thing, but workers look to their superiors to define the real expectations. From the CEO on down, leadership should demonstrate healthy attitudes about work-life integration.

If the boss is staying late every evening, it doesn't matter what your policy says. Leadership is sending an unspoken message that places pressure on employees to prioritize work above family life.



3. Work with Employees to Manage Workloads

We recently asked people what was holding them back from having a better work-life balance. Several pointed to “client requests and due dates,” “not being able to say no to leadership,” “too much work and too many meetings,” and “work responsibilities that just can’t be met during an eight-hour workday.”

In fact, [in a 2019 survey](#), 82% of employees said they feel overworked.

Managers may not realize how much of a workload their team members are shouldering because employees may be hesitant to report it. After all, no one wants to be seen as a complainer.

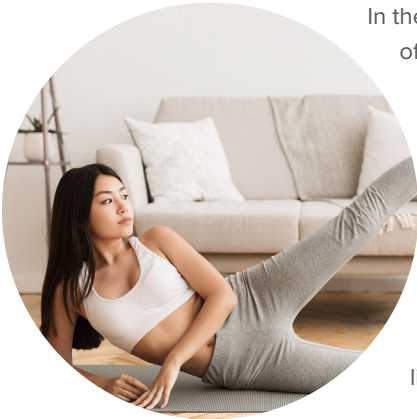
Ryan says supervisors should keep the lines of communication open and approach their teams with empathy and compassion, letting their employees know it’s okay to speak up when they’re stretched past the breaking point.

“If somebody seems overwhelmed or frazzled,” she states, “management should notice that and take the initiative to say, ‘Gee, you’ve got a lot on your plate right now. Can we talk about that? Because I’m worried you might feel like you can’t get this all done.’”



How Wellness Programs Can Aid Work-Life Integration

“I come first. If I am not healthy and happy, then I will be a drain on others, including my partner, my friends, my coworkers, and my family. I need to make time to take care of myself. Period. I carve out at least 20 minutes per day for physical activity every day. No excuses. It’s the best thing I can do for my physical body and my mental health.” —Alisa



In the struggle to balance work with raising a family, maintaining a home, and caring for parents, one of the first things to fall by the wayside is self-care. Employees focus on making the boss happy and keeping their kids healthy before they think about nourishing their own bodies and minds. But, of course, a person cannot be successful in the other areas of their life if they don’t take care of their own needs.

Your company wellness program can be a critical resource your employees turn to when they can’t find the time or space to practice healthy habits, or when they need help devising strategies to manage their hectic lives.

Here are a few ways your wellness program can support your employees in their quest for work-life integration:



Spread Classes and Workshops Around the Daily Schedule

Too many wellness programs see low participation because of scheduling conflicts. You can't expect employees to attend a yoga class when the class is at 4:30 p.m. and most people have long commutes or have to get home to take care of children.

"Understanding the needs and interests of your workforce is just so fundamental to how we design these wellness programs," explains Ryan.

Instead of offering program options only after work, try offering them at different times of the day, so employees can choose what works best for them.

For example, if your company has adopted a flexible scheduling policy, there should be nothing stopping employees from taking a break for a few sun salutations at 2 p.m. and going back to their desks centered and focused for work.



Promote Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Employees sometimes need someone to talk to, but they may feel as if they can't truly open up to managers or human resources representatives. An employee assistance program (EAP) can provide that sympathetic ear, along with helpful guidance on challenges ranging from legal confusion, to marital difficulties, to work-life conflicts.

[EAPs serve employees](#) by allowing them to speak confidentially, by phone, with certified counselors.

Those in leadership positions should speak freely about using your company's EAP, modeling to employees that it is perfectly acceptable to make use of company resources.

Your EAP may also be able to refer experienced speakers on subjects such as juggling caregiving with work.

Offer Helpful Educational Sessions

Work-life balance, time management, mindfulness, and other self-care issues are all hot topics in the corporate world. There is no shortage of speakers, instructors, and coaches willing to lend their expertise toward helping your employees to get their lives in order.

Consider launching a regular speaker series—and make it fun, so it doesn't feel like a chore. How about a class on cooking quick weeknight meals? Or a demonstration on grabbing quick moments for meditation throughout the day?

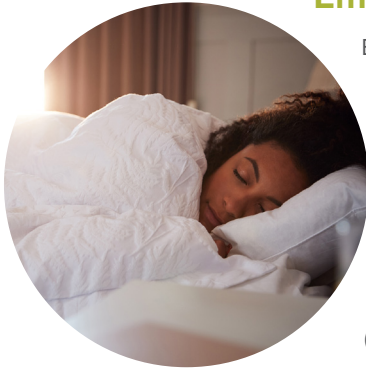


Emphasize the Importance of Sleep

Busy people often see sleep as optional. But the science is indisputable: We need our sleep not just to function at our best, but for our health and emotional wellbeing.

“There’s a link between insomnia, mental health, and depression,” explains Ryan. When employees suffer from chronic sleep deficits, their productivity goes down and their healthcare claims go up.

As with other aspects of wellness, leadership can make a difference in employee sleep patterns simply by good behavior. Managers should not, for example, brag about starting the day at 3:30 a.m. (unless they’re also bragging about going to bed at 7 p.m.).



Work-Life Integration Is Everyone's Concern

As the sole element within your company entirely devoted to employee wellbeing, your wellness program can be a champion for work-life integration. But you can't go it alone. Start the conversation about work-life integration with leadership and then work hand-in-hand to transform your company into the flexible workplace of the future.

Ultimately, it's up to everyone to build a culture where work duties, personal obligations, and self-care receive equal respect and where employees feel supported to live their best lives in every part of their lives.



If you're interested in learning more about designing a wellness program that can be completely customized to help your employees achieve better work-life balance, [contact us today](#). We'll show you how to be a partner in your employees' well-being with a configurable, holistic, and adaptable corporate wellness platform.

[1] All quotes come from a 2019 internal poll of WellRight employees.



WELLRIGHT

WellRight, LLC

600 West Van Buren Suite 800

Chicago Illinois 60607

Email : info@wellright.com

www.wellright.com