

Work-Life BALANCE

While we cannot control all factors impacting our work-life balance, there are some things we can do to achieve better work-life balance & be more productive at work.

Almost everyone complains they have too much to do and not enough time. There is constant competition for our time and energy. This article describes some challenges involved in achieving work-life balance, an indicator of health, and suggests steps we can take to help achieve this elusive goal. Recent surveys (Linda Duxbury, Chris Higgins, & Donna Coghill) of Canadians have shown that difficulties arise when meeting the demands in one area are incompatible with meeting the demands in another. This includes:

- **Role overload**- the total demands on time and energy are too great to fulfill the roles adequately or comfortably.
- **Role interference**-the demands and responsibilities in one area make it more difficult to fulfill all responsibilities.
- **Caregiver strain**- burdens associated with providing care to an elderly dependent.

Personal Coping Strategies

The survey data suggests that the majority of employees do not deal with stress effectively. Most employees in our time-crunched society just try to do it all and work harder. Some try-

- **Active coping strategies**- prioritizing, scheduling, organizing, and planning. The majority of employees who use these techniques to cope with stress give a higher priority to work than family. Few cope by delegating, perhaps because there is no one to delegate to.
- **Social support networks**- Most Canadians try to obtain support on their own, rarely asking their work colleagues, friends or family for help.
- **Escape/avoidance**- 1 in 5 employees try to forget about their stressors and 1 in 3 frequently seeks out other activities to take their mind off it. Escapist strategies are not effective as the situation remains unchanged.
- **Reactive coping strategies**- such as alleviating the symptoms of stress with an alcoholic drink (12%), and / or prescription, over-the-counter, or illegal drugs (11%). These strategies are linked to increased illness and absenteeism, family dysfunction, and reduced productivity.



Family Coping Strategies

Within the family, employees cope by:

- **Restructuring / redefining family role expectations**- encouraging children to help each other and assist with household tasks, trying to be flexible about covering household tasks and planning family time. **Employees in egalitarian families are more able to cope with role overload than their colleagues.**
- **Sacrificing personal needs and standards**- getting by on less sleep, reducing outside activities, and leaving household tasks undone. This suggests that families are coping by putting work demands first. **Employees who occasionally cut down on outside activities are more able to cope.**

- **Putting family first**- limiting job involvement, modifying work schedule, leaving work problems at work, and planning work changes around family. **Employees who put family first report lower levels of role overload than their fellow employees.**
- **Seeking social support**- relying on extended family and friends for help and **hiring outside help** to care for children (42%) and elderly dependents (26%) and buying more goods and services (45%).

When used in moderation, giving priority to work tasks and delegating family responsibilities to others appears to be an effective way for employees with child and/or eldercare responsibilities to cope with role overload.

How to Prioritize

- **Review how much you are asking yourself, the choices you are making, and their impact.**
- **List all the roles you are juggling and for each ask yourself- *Why I am doing this? When did I start doing this? Did I intend to keep doing this? Do I want to continue doing this?***
- **Determine your priorities** - How do you want to live your life? What roles are most important to you?
- **Give yourself permission and make necessary changes** - Achieving balance requires compromise. Share the workload and work more as a team.
- **Just do it and don't feel guilty.**

Recommendations for At Home

- ✓ Limit the amount of work you take home and protect your private time by not responding to email from work.
- ✓ Create a buffer between work and home, for example, take a brief walk beginning the evening's routine.
- ✓ Get adequate sleep every night, exercise and eat healthy foods to feel more energized.
- ✓ Determine what chores can be shared, done by someone else, or let go while maintaining standards at home.
- ✓ If you have care-giving responsibilities prioritize and delegate work to others.
- ✓ Make time for personal care to stay healthy, have energy to care for others and be more effective at work.

Recommendations for At Work

- ✓ Schedule brief breaks throughout the day to improve productivity and effectiveness.
- ✓ Take advantage of your employer's supportive policies and flexible work arrangements.
- ✓ At the end of each day, set your priorities for the following day and be realistic about what you can achieve in the time available.
- ✓ Respond to email only once or twice a day.
- ✓ Address concerns about deadlines and deliverables early. If a deadline is unrealistic, communicate your concern to your supervisor immediately.
- ✓ Take all of your allotted vacation time. This allows you to return to work refreshed and more productive.



Work-life balance is different for everyone, and changes over time. Achieving work-life balance requires time and effort to implement changes that will benefit all aspects of our lives.

YOUR LOGO

For confidential assistance
Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
www.browncrawshaw.com