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How to Help Your People Achieve a Work/Life Balance

by Robert Evangelista

"No executive has ever suffered because his subordinates were strong and effective."
- Peter Drucker

There is no denying that the intersection between work and the rest of life is growing. Demands of careers and downsized organizations have placed burdens on employees at a time when their aging parents and growing children are requiring more and more attention. Technology has served to keep us in touch, often at times when we wish we weren't.

Often, the challenges that employees face on the job are viewed separately and distinctly from those faced at home or outside of work. As owners and managers, we ask employees to do their best to "leave their problems at the door." At the same time, their spouses are asking them to "leave their job when they leave their job each day." But throughout it all, we expect our team, especially the good ones, to rise above their outside conflicts and focus on the task at hand. Reality is, the drain on productivity is often substantial.

Instead, we should be teaching our staff to handle life issues in the same manner we ask them to support internal business issues. If we teach and reinforce good support habits in the workplace AND show employees how they can also apply outside, we may better enable individuals to overcome work/life conflicts. In other words, the kind of support that makes a print shop more efficient isn't all that different from the support needed for a new kitchen: Making sure you have the right skills, the proper tools, have a plan, are working in a time efficient manner, have considered safety precautions, etc.

Any business initiative or problem is best handled while recognizing the need for four distinct support systems: Skills, Environment, Motivation and Team

Cooperation. These same support systems must be in place to be successful in our personal lives. Whether it is handling a tough customer service issue or losing weight, we must treat our needs for support the same.

In the workplace, employees are demanding of support, since they know they cannot succeed without it. Yet, outside, they embark on countless initiatives, attacking all sorts of problems, without these same kinds of success enablers.

Skills -- To successfully act in the workplace, employees must have the knowledge and ability to perform. The same goes for life issues. A desire to lose weight is useless without knowledge of nutrition and proper exercises. Recognizing the need for information or knowledge is just as important as seeking advice on how to use a treadmill.

Environment -- Employees succeed more often when they are in a supportive environment that provides them with the proper tools, space, resources and social/emotional support. Likewise, someone intent on losing weight may need a proper environment to exercise in, support from family members or a cupboard that is not stocked with Twinkies. Ignoring any of these can provide the catalyst for failure.

Motivation -- A popular support system in the workplace, motivation comes in many forms. It can also be positively or negatively presented, with different responses produced. A fear of losing one's job may induce panic, while the simple "good job" may result in respectful behavior. At home, positive encouragement or the gift of a new, black dress may have a significantly stronger impact than hearing someone say "Lose weight before you bust out of those pants!" staying in their prescribed role.

Team cooperation -- In the workplace, we encourage teamwork, knowing that peer pressure can inspire proper behavior as much as the social support, camaraderie and synergy. Not wanting to "let the others down" is often cited as a driver for model team behavior. A willing partner or spouse can be the difference between a trip to the gym followed by a vegetarian dinner instead of a skipped workout and a burger.

By reinforcing supportive behaviors in the workplace and helping our staff to make the connection to their home lives, we hopefully are teaching them how to set their personal lives up for success. With strong elements of these four support systems in place, your team will be well positioned to handle the challenges in their personal lives that often impact our workplace.

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"The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership."

- Harvey Firestone, legendary tire magnate



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Support Questions For Life Challenges

Ask yourself these questions when faced with any challenge in your personal life:

Skills

- What will you need to know?
- What skills, if mastered, will make your task easier?
- What can you practice ahead of time?
- What do you need to be good at to do what you have to do?

Environment

- What support will you need from others?
- What physical requirements are there for a successful task?
- What tools or resources will you need?
- What mood or setting is conducive to task success?

Motivation

- Why are you taking on the task?
- Why do you WANT to do it?
- What are the personal rewards?
- Who will benefit in a way that impacts their lives?

Team Cooperation

- Who will you need to work or communicate closely with?
- Who is in a position to help you to be successful?
- What positive reinforcement or encouragement could you use, and from whom?

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www.businessofwinning.com

or

email us at

win@businessofwinning.com