

Getting the Balance Right

The most common effects of getting the work/life balance wrong is stress. We experience stress when we feel like we've lost control of events.

Stress is a very individual condition. Put two people under the same pressure, one may find it exciting and rise to the challenge; another may find it too much and become ill. Put those same two people in a different role and their reactions may reverse.

How people behave when stressed is also very individual. Some drink or smoke heavily. Others lose sleep, and stop eating properly. What always happens is that people suffering from stress become less effective at work and unhappy outside work. This is a very good reason to do something about it.

If you think you might be stressed, then you may need to think about making changes to your work/life balance.

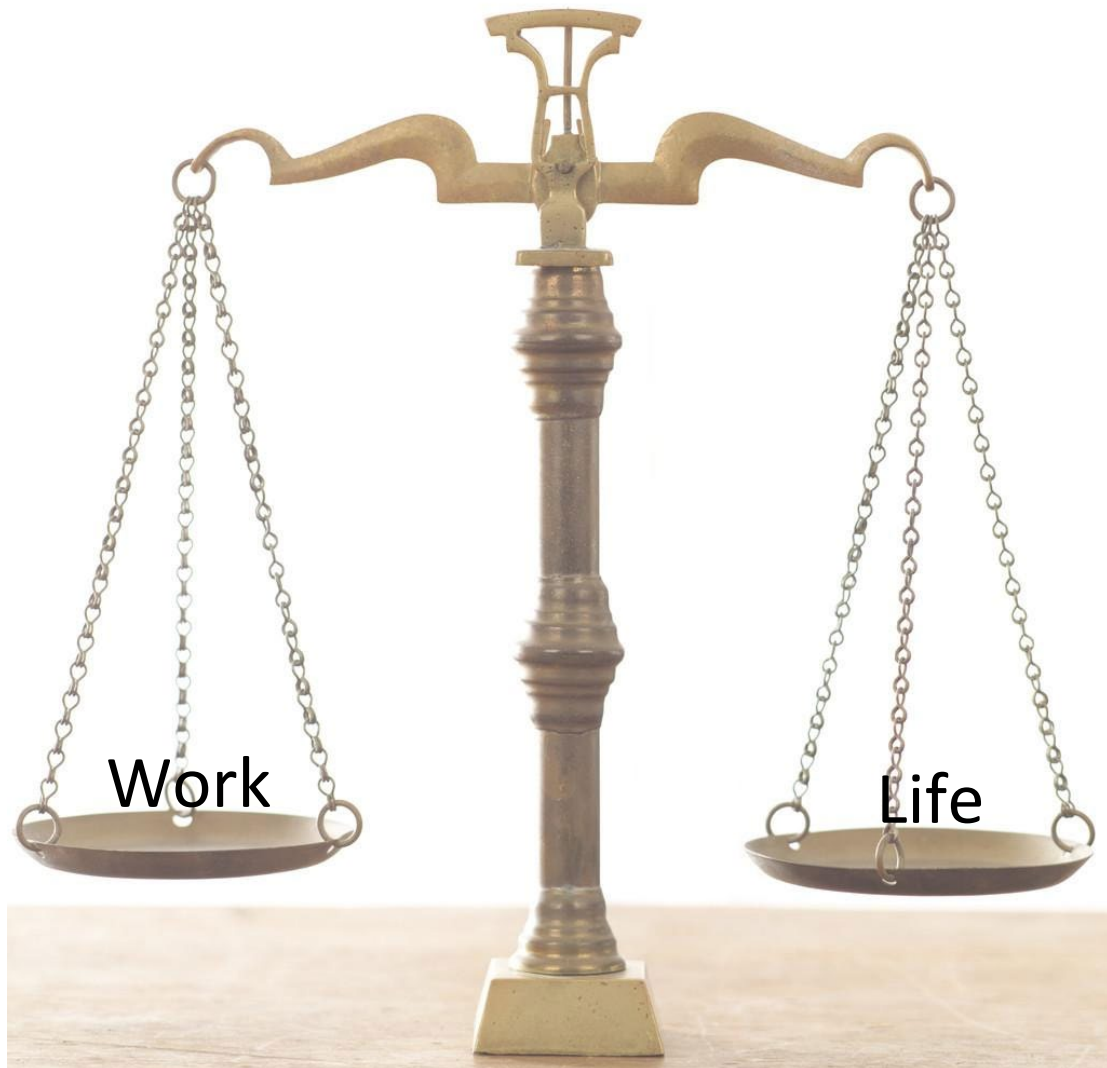
What we aim to do during this tutorial is:

- Explain what work/life balance is;
- Discuss if your work/life balance is right;
- Identify ways to improve your work/life balance;
- Outline how to develop a work/life strategy.

What is work/life balance?

Work/life balance is about flexibility – taking into account the diverse needs of employees and balancing them against the needs of employers.

To help you imagine the right kind of balance, think of yourself as a set of scales, juggling all of the things you have to do throughout the day to ensure the smooth running of your work and home life.



The Balance

Are you working effectively?

We all have experience of having too much work to do and too little time to do it in. One solution is to work even longer hours to stay on top of our workload or to earn some extra cash.

The alternative is to work more intelligently. Focus on the things that are important to job success. Reduce the time spent on low priority thoughts and things that are out of your control.

The work analysis tool will help you to learn to work smarter rather than just harder.

Review Your Job Description

Look at your job description and identify key objectives and priorities within it. Look at the part that outlines performance as this will give measures on how you should be performing.

Find out what training is available for the role and ensure you have the appropriate coaching or training, so that you know as much as you need to know to fulfil your role.

Understand Strategy and Culture

Your job exists for a reason and will ultimately be determined by the strategy of the company. This could be in the form of the mission/vision statement or values/promise. Make sure you perform your tasks well and have an understanding of how they fit into the overall business strategy.

Make sure you understand the business culture and that you are part of it. Your actions should re-enforce the company's culture, or at least not go against it.

Find out who the top achievers are. Why are they successful?

Inside or outside the business, there may be other people who are in a similar role to you and are seen as high achievers. Find out how they work and what they do differently, if anything, to be successful. Learn these skills and adopt them as your own.

Check you have the right attitude, support and resources to do the job

The next step is to check that you have the support needed to enable you to do an excellent job. If you feel you do not, start work on obtaining some for yourself. Talk to your manager or Training department to see if they can help.

Confirm Priorities with your Manager

At this stage, you should have a thorough understanding of what your job entails, and what your key objectives are. You should also have a good idea of the resources you need and any additional support you may need to do the best you can.

This is the time to talk through your job with your manager, confirming that you share an understanding of what constitutes good performance in the role.

Take Action

You should now know what you have to do to be successful in your role.

Develop a Work/Life Strategy

Identifying the important parts in your life and looking at where the weaker parts are takes great courage, but will also give you a good understanding of the areas that need to be improved to help you take back control of your work/life balance.

The Wheel of Life Exercise is a good way of identifying areas that are pulling you down and gives you focus on developing those areas with support from either at work or from your private life.

Summary

Understanding your work/life balance is an important factor for reducing your stress and giving you greater understanding of where your work and life priorities lie.

Having an understanding of your role, where you fit within the business, the support you are entitled to and understanding of the business vision and values, play an important part in reducing your stress and making you feel accomplished at work.