

MOVE OVER WORK-LIFE BALANCE; WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION IS HERE TO STAY.

BY JOELLE MONACO

We've spoken about work-life balance for decades, which many have found unachievable, unmanageable, and outdated compared to our current lifestyles and business operations. How do we build a career while having a life outside of the office? More importantly, how do we feel engaged and a part of it? It's called work-life integration, finding a flow and routine that works for each individual, allowing everyone to succeed in the workplace while seeing the value in things outside of the office.

Work-life balance can be defined as a clear boundary between work and life; when you clock out, you turn off work, and when you clock in, you turn off life. If it only it were that easy, and maybe it once was when technology didn't make it so easy to connect or be accessible. Considering when this concept became popular was also around when employers began to focus on vacation and sick time off as an employee benefit to ensure individuals took time away from the workplace. However, times have changed, and individuals are more engaged and productive than ever in the workplace with technological advances.

Employers need to work towards preserving an individual's energy and creativity while understanding that the workplace of the '80s is very different from where we are today.

In this evolution, work-life integration has come to the forefront. Work-life integration is the concept where those hard shifts don't exist, and there is synergy; nine to five isn't always the standard. Individuals seek careers that they are passionate about and have meaning in and outside of work; these two parts of our life that we've tried to separate are actually recognized together, more now than ever. Work-life integration is building a structure that, in many cases, individualizes and creates time and space for both your professional and personal goals, desires and responsibilities. As a result, the workplace may provide flexibility in work style, workdays, times, and locations.

Suppose you consider nurses, first responders, retailers, hospitality professionals, relators, or chefs; in these professions, individuals can fulfill their passions through their work. In many cases, their work style consists of various options to

choose from, providing them the ability to choose a workstyle that best supports their lifestyle. Engaging team members to assess when they are most productive and find a workstyle that fits within their life creates a space where individuals feel empowered, valued, trusted, and engaged.

The economics of a workplace culture that supports and encourages work-life integration experiences reduced absenteeism and presenteeism, reduced turnover, increased ability to attract workforce, improved health and wellness, and increased productivity, to name a few.

78% said that flexible work would allow them to live a healthier life, and 86% said they would be less stressed, according to a FlexJobs survey.

How do you begin to create a culture that supports work-life integration or assess your current structure? Here are a few places to get started or compare to what you are already doing.

- Educate your leadership on the why, and provide them with tools and support
- Promoting a work-life integration within your organization, including in organization policies, values, and resources
- Involve individuals from various teams and organizational levels throughout the process



- Be creative and open
- Create clear expectations and boundaries
- Conduct continuous evaluation and tailoring as needed
- Understand somethings may not work, and that's okay
- Lead by example

It's also important to remember that some team members may not be interested in taking advantage of these opportunities or find more comfort in their traditional nine to five, and that's okay. However, we can't hold back, overlook, or exclude the portion of the workforce seeking this type of integration.

**Keep up the great work engaging employees and teams of tomorrow,
Joelle M. Monaco**