

balance sheets

A series of information sheets for employers interested in helping employees balance their work, family, and personal responsibilities

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Xsheets™

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The Center for
Work & Family
BOSTON COLLEGE
CARROLL SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

One Small Step 

MIDWESTERN
WORK-FAMILY
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“Work-family programs are beginning to stir up a palpable backlash in some organizations. Resentment is likely to be strong when formal policies support a narrow range of employees’ nonwork needs - for example, offering day care referrals and parental leave but not elder care, family emergency leave, or unpaid time off for other reasons, such as taking a sabbatical or going to school.”

Mary Young
Research Faculty
Boston University

“What single and childless employees want is the message from their employers that they matter just as much as the co-workers with baby and wedding photos on their desks. The message must be pushed through policies, practices, benefits - and attitudes.”

Gillian Flynn, Editor
Workforce Magazine
(formerly the Personnel Journal)

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Beyond Dependent Care

refers to a comprehensive strategy or philosophy that recognizes the diversity of people's lives outside of work. It encompasses initiatives that address a wide range of life cycle needs including, but not limited to, caring for children.

MOVING TOWARDS EQUITY:

The language around work and family issues is in flux, and driving these changes are important questions about benefits equity. The move from "child care" to "work and family" in the late 80's reflected a general consensus that caring for children is only one dimension of family responsibilities that impacts business. Many employers have recently shifted to the term "work/life" to be more inclusive, however this change has sparked significant debate. Some argue that the term "work/family" obscures the personal life issues of single or married adults without children. Others worry that "work/life" dilutes the focus on family issues such as child care, or implies that "we've fixed that problem." The key challenge for many employers lies in defining the term "family." More workplace initiatives are now addressing a wide range of relationships involving emotional or financial ties, including in-laws, grandparents, domestic partners, and pets.

Equity concerns voiced in focus groups and strategy sessions also bring to light questions about the business rationale underlying the growing menu of workplace initiatives that address, and go beyond, dependent care. Is the goal to improve employee effectiveness on the job? To reduce employee stress and related health care costs? To make your company a "great place to work," or to make it easier for employees to work more? With an increasing number and variety of personal issues included under the work/life umbrella, where does the employer draw the line, and why? Questions such as these will continue to surface as both workplace programs and terminology continue to evolve.

RELEVANT STATISTICS

- Not everyone is raising children. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 66% of employees in the workplace at any given time are not rearing children under the age of 18.
- Attention to Quality of Life. 36% of the 150 HR and other executives from the nation's largest companies said that paying more attention to quality-of-life issues is the most important change businesses will have to make in order to attract skilled professionals from Generation X. (Office Team, Menlo Park, CA, 1996)
- Defining "Family." A 1993 Conference Board study found that a two-tiered definition of family is emerging: eligibility for medical benefits is often restricted to control costs, whereas productivity benefits justify broader eligibility for work/family programs.

MODEL PROGRAMS

Andersen Consulting, headquartered in Chicago, IL developed a concierge service after a 1993 survey revealed employees were concerned about not having enough time to take care of their personal lives. "Andersen...At Your Service" is offered to all Andersen employees in participating U.S. locations. Employees pay \$5 an hour for the service, which is charged in 30-minute increments and billed via their paychecks. At the 1500+ employee San Francisco, CA office, the service is used for personal errands such as planning ski trips, finding apartment rentals, or purchasing flowers and other gifts.

Arnold Communications, Inc., a 745-person marketing agency headquartered in Boston, MA has created a worklife manager position and implemented several initiatives in 1996, including: a "Recovery Room" for employees when they need to find a quiet place (whether because of a sudden headache or to take care of pre- or post-natal needs), free access to a national resource and referral agency, corporate memberships to local health clubs, and tuition reimbursement for career-related courses.

Chevron Corporation, headquartered in San Francisco, CA provides up to \$1000 (tax protected) for services that can help employees and their families adjust to a relocation (e.g., counseling on common obstacles that can prevent a successful move, or skills assessment and resume preparation for spouses). Employees -- whether single or with families -- are also encouraged to use Chevron's EAP services to deal with the emotional aspects of relocating.

CISCO Systems, headquartered in San Jose, CA offers their employees a number of corporate fitness programs, including an on-site fitness center and "boot camp" classes that include drills in the company parking lot. Employees who take advantage of these programs say it helps them put energy into their jobs and keep balance in their lives.

Fleet Financial Group, based in Boston, MA introduced a corporate health promotion program in 1995 which successfully engaged its 37,000 employees to take positive steps to improve their own physical and mental health and that of their families. The program, known as Fleet LIFE (LIFE stands for Lifestyle choices; Individual activities; Family interaction; and Education), includes health risk assessments, fitness membership discounts and a bi-monthly newsletter called LifeTIMES.

Genencor International, Inc. relocated 180 employees from their R&D site in South San Francisco to Palo Alto, CA in 1996 and as a result, employees faced longer commutes to this new facility. To help instill a sense of flexibility and fun at work, the HR department purchased seven bicycles for employee recreational use while at work. Genencor also offers casual dress days on Fridays.

Millipore, a manufacturing company based in Bedford, MA recently added sabbatical leave, flex-time and vacation buy and sell policies that are attractive to all its 1,600 employees. The company also offers flexible benefits so employees can tailor their benefits to fit their lifestyles. Millipore's information and referral service was expanded in 1996 to LifeBalance Resources, which provides a wide range of services beyond dependent care: from finding a pet-sitter, to assistance with purchasing consumer products, buying a home or mending bad credit.

Sun Microsystems headquartered in Mountain View, CA addresses quality of life issues for its 19,356 employees with health and fitness programs, career counseling services, work/life resource and referral, and a flexible benefits plan. A SunStore located at each major company site offers take home meals, dry cleaning, photo developing, and video rental to save employees time and aggravation. Sun also has a concierge service dedicated to taking care of employees' special needs in their business or personal life that averages about 400 calls a month.

Trust Insurance Company in Taunton, MA offers its 400 associates several on-site benefits: a fitness center, aerobic classes, flu shots, skin analyzer machine, body fat analysis, cholesterol and blood pressure screening. Associates who exercise 684 miles (10 minutes of exercise = 1 mile) are entered into a raffle for a cruise to Bermuda. A "WellnessWorks" team maintains the enthusiasm that supports one of the company's mottos: "A Healthy Place to Work."

Unum America, the Portland, ME - based disability insurer, established an on-site Career Center in late 1995 in response to employee interest in career development and resiliency. The Center offers the company's 4,000 employees support in exploring how your career fits into your life, and how to create greater satisfaction in your work and personal life. Over 350 employees have used the Center to date.

CONSIDERATIONS

Develop communication strategies around life cycle themes. For example, To Your Health, Caring for Others, Planning for the Future, It's About Time, and Community Involvement are the themes around which **Fleet Financial Group** in Boston, MA defines its work/life initiatives. Similarly, **Stanford University** in Palo Alto, CA communicates its work/life benefits around themes such as: When You Are New to the Community or Looking for Housing; When You Are Considering Pregnancy or Adoption; When You or a Member of Your Family is Ill; When You Invest in Education for Yourself or Your Child; When You are Looking for Recreation, Travel and Entertainment.

Everyone wants some flexibility. While alternative work options are very attractive from an equity standpoint, employees may assume that flexible schedules are only available for working mothers. Many companies, such as **BlueCross/BlueShield of Massachusetts**, issue guidelines to make sure mothers aren't the only ones granted these arrangements.

Question assumptions and examine inequities. Who is staying late? Traveling more? Getting promoted? Using work/life benefits? Are these people representative of the range of life status or family types in your workforce?

Listen to employees and explore cultural differences. Employees may be reluctant to articulate perceived inequities. Take note, though, when employees do speak up. For example, at a recent focus group with engineers at **Sybase, Inc.** in Emeryville, CA, one employee, while discussing the level of benefits available to her and her domestic partner, compared it to "traditional" families. She, in turn, was challenged by an Asian woman concerned that elders in her family -- who live in her home and take care of her children while she works -- cannot be insured under the company's health plan while homosexual employees can insure their "domestic partners." Such dialogue underscores diversity as an important aspect of planning and implementing work/life initiatives.

For more information...

*See other issues of the **Balance Sheets** on: Financial Assistance Programs, Elder Care, Domestic Partner Benefits, Telecommuting and What's Fair? Defining Equity.*