

# 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™

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

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

**One Small Step**  


MIDWESTERN  
WORK-FAMILY  
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*"It's about being a  
business that has a heart,  
but it absolutely helps  
us as a business, too."*

Valerie Talbott  
Founder

Legacy Personnel Group  
Fort Lauderdale, FL

*"It's nice to know that  
our personal lives are  
respected here. It's one  
of the perks and definitely  
one reason why people  
stay here. Kids are a  
big priority here, whether  
you have them or not."*

Cathi O'Sullivan  
Employee

Wuthmann Associates  
San Rafael, CA

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## Broadening Our Scope: Work/Life Strategies in Small Businesses

**Definition:** For purposes of this publication, "Small Businesses" includes any organization with 500 employees or fewer. The focus of this issue is to highlight small business work/life solutions that larger businesses and work/life professionals might learn from.

While most published information about work/life solutions centers on large companies, the family responsibilities that are the motivation for such efforts are not isolated to their employees. The difficulties of lost time, lower work performance and requests for time off that result from employees' struggling with work/life balance are experienced by large and small businesses alike.

Whether they run a start-up company, a family business, a non-profit organization or a satellite office, small business employers consider work/life issues as much, if not more, than their larger counterparts. In the National Study of Small and Medium-Sized Businesses conducted in 1998 by the Center for Work & Family at Boston College, businesses with fewer than 50 employees were more likely to state that helping employees achieve work/life balance was a "very great" priority (37%), in contrast to firms with more than 500 employees (9%).

It is not surprising then that small business employers and employees are now paying more attention to developing work/life programs than ever before. As Congress and state legislatures across the country consider bills that will expand the Family and Medical Leave Act to employers with fewer than 50 employees, more small businesses are looking at how they can support their employees' efforts to balance work and life responsibilities.

Given the relative freedom with which small organizations can often experiment with new programs, there is a great deal that large businesses can learn from them. Consider:

**The Opportunities:** Smaller organizations tend to have more centralized decision-making. Smaller work environments tend to encourage more individualized, personalized, customized and unique approaches to work/life issues. It is often easier to launch new programs or try new ideas in a smaller business.

**The Challenges:** Expertise is often isolated to individual employees in small organizations making it difficult to accommodate the need for leaves or alternate schedules. Small business employers often feel they can't afford to offer what they consider to be costly work/life benefits.

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## RELEVANT STATISTICS

1. Nearly 90% of today's business firms employ fewer than 20 workers.
2. Over half of all US workers are employed at a business with fewer than 500 employees.
3. Close to 60% of the nearly 3.3 million new jobs created during 1994 were established in industries dominated by small companies.
4. A 1997 survey for KeyCorp found that small-business owners were twice as likely to build a company culture that supports work and family issues than are their larger corporate counterparts.

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## GETTING STARTED

Getting started doesn't have to mean launching large and costly initiatives. Consider these suggestions:

**Time-related Policies** – Help employees manage their time by allowing them to adjust their schedules or give employees time off for parent-teacher conferences.

**Financial Support** – Some benefits make it easier for employees to save their own tax dollars, such as Dependent Care Assistance Plans or financial counseling.

**Information** – Company-sponsored brown bag lunches, parent support groups, newsletters, and bulletin boards on community resources can help employees find the information they need.

**Direct Services** – Reserving slots at local child care or family day care facilities can make the search for quality and affordable care easier for employees.

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## MODEL PROGRAMS

**Tularik Inc.**, an early stage, private biotechnology company with just over 200 employees in South San Francisco, CA, was looking for options to help employees with child care needs after the company realized it was hiring people with a variety of family needs. The company looked within the community to see if there was a child care center which was interested in working with the company to help fill its requirements. Tularik's search resulted in an agreement with a child care center to reserve up to ten slots for Tularik employees. The company also helps subsidize the cost of care for qualified employees. One particular advantage of this agreement is that the center expanded its hours to 7:00 am to 6:30 pm, which lets Tularik employees work the hours they need to in an rapidly growing company. Tularik's management feels this program adds to an overall positive employee relations atmosphere, helps employees balance work and home life and improves employee productivity.

**Wainwright Bank** in Boston, MA, grants each of its 101 employees a generous amount of personal time reserve (PTR) to use however they see fit when scheduling time off from work. Employees can carry over accumulated PTR balances from one year to another. The sick disability reserve (SDR) portion of the Program consists of days the Bank accumulates for employees in order to provide paid time off for certain circumstances (i.e. FMLA qualifying events and bereavement). Employees accrue and carry over any unused SDR balances up to a maximum of 90 days, which is when the long-term disability coverage would take effect.

With 500 employees spread throughout the East and North Bay areas near San Francisco, CA, **The Mechanics Bank** was initially challenged to serve its employees work/life needs. However, the bank has found its full service Employee Assistance Program to be extremely successful. The EAP provides child and elder care resource and referral in addition to counseling for employees in areas as varied as family concerns, legal, financial, job/career issues and education/college. Another important aspect of the EAP has been crisis intervention services. "We knew from contacts with our employees that they were trying to balance many parts of their personal lives with work. Unlike earlier EAPs that predominately addressed mental/substance abuse issues, we have

more usage on the family relationships, change and legal categories. A side benefit to the Bank has been a reduction in the number of workers' compensation claims."

Telecommuting developed at **Information Mapping**, based in Boston, MA, when valuable employees had to respond to changing personal situations. With 40 employees spread throughout 14 states, the training and consulting company relies heavily on email and teleconferencing to keep telecommuters in close contact with coworkers and clients. Managers say that by responding to employees' needs on a case-by-case basis, they are able to help employees achieve balance while retaining talented people.

**Consulting Psychologists Press** has experienced great employee response to its flexible scheduling policy. Of the company's 100 or so employees, 26% are virtual employees who work outside of the Bay Area and over half of the employees in the company headquarters in Palo Alto, CA, work an alternative schedule. Some employees arrive to work as early as 5:00 am and then leave early to accommodate family schedules or outside interests like completing a graduate degree. New moms returning to work often start later in the day so they can spend more time with their children in the morning hours. Employees say the flexible schedule allows them to work around day-care hours and avoid difficult commutes. For CPP, the program enables the company to recruit and retain talented employees in a difficult labor market.

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## **BANDING TOGETHER**

Many small businesses are finding consortiums or partnerships to be the most cost effective way to provide work-life programs.

For example, the Silicon Valley Employer Dependent Care Association (SVEDCA) is made up of six local employers (5 of which have fewer than 500 employees) to provide access to subsidized back-up child care and enhanced child, adult and elder care resource and referral services. These services are administered by The Work Options Group, the administrative company for the consortium, to identify, screen and contract with local providers. The Work Options Group also takes responsibility for 'rolling out' the program to the employees of new member companies; provides monthly marketing materials to remind employees of

these benefits; and provides current utilization data on a quarterly basis. The result is low cost quality services for employees. For these employers, SVEDCA makes it easier to provide benefits while eliminating the administrative work usually necessary to offer such programs.

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## **NEW FROM BOSTON COLLEGE**

"**Strategies for Small and Medium Businesses: The Work/Life Edge**" is a new resource packet developed by the Boston College Center for Work & Family for the Department of Labor. The packet is intended for the owners and managers of small and medium sized businesses.

Based on the National Work/Life Study of Small and Medium Businesses, the packet is designed to help small business employers answer three important questions:

1. Are work/life issues relevant to your business?
2. When does it make good business sense for you to respond to employees' work/life situations?
3. What are your options?

The packet contains the following:

- Descriptions of innovative work/life policies and practices that some companies have successfully established.
- Results of a national survey of small and medium-sized businesses – the work/life issues they've encountered and how they manage those issues.
- Action steps for getting started.
- Resources and contacts.

The packet is available for \$15 from the Center for Work & Family:

[http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/csom/cwf](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/csom/cwf)

or call 617-552-2865.