

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
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“Managers are the interpreters and implementers of policy. They can be champions of work and family programs, leading the drive for enhanced productivity and fulfilling the employee recruitment and retention advantages of the policies.

On the other hand ...without thorough knowledge of corporate policy, the bottom-line benefits of the policy, or the conflicts many employees face while trying to balance work responsibilities and family demands, managers can block the way for progress.”

Kathy Cramer and John Pearce

“Work and Family Policies Become Productivity Tools,”

*AMA Management Review,
November 1990.*

“Our training gives managers the tools they need to respond to employees’ requests for flexible work arrangements. They understand that under some circumstances it’s okay to say ‘no,’ or that it may make business sense to say ‘yes.’”

Kim Coughlin, Work/Life Manager, The Hartford Financial Services Group.

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Manager Training on Work/Life Issues

Definition: Seminars and training sessions that help managers recognize, understand and handle work/life balance issues. Manager training is just one of many options available for employers to educate managers about these issues (others include newsletters, brochures, tool-kits, and individual coaching).

More employers are focusing attention on training their managers on work/life issues to ensure effective utilization of available programs and to create workplaces that are supportive of employees and families.

Recent studies have shown that the level of “supportiveness” of an employee’s direct supervisor can have a direct impact on the performance of the employee, as well as the worker’s ability to manage work/family conflicts. A study of over 15,000 Canadian workers conducted recently by Linda Duxbury of Carleton University and Christopher Higgins of the University of Western Ontario found that employees with supportive managers were more likely to:

- have high job satisfaction and high organizational commitment
- have lower levels of job stress and life stress
- feel secure about their job, trust their manager and engage in upward feedback

A 1997 national study done by the Families and Work Institute showed similar results. Employees who work in environments that are supportive, respectful, fair and responsive to their needs off the job are most committed to helping their employers succeed.

Some Questions to Consider:

- Should training be offered as a stand-alone class, a module within a general management class, or within a training course covering such related issues as diversity, organizational values, or employee wellness?
- Should the training be mandatory or optional?
- Should the program focus on flexible work options or the broader topic of work/life issues?
- Does the organization have in-house expertise, or will outside trainers be used?
- Which training methods should be used? Note: According to a 1992 survey by the Conference Board, the top five training program methods were (in order): small group discussions, lectures, case studies, films and role playing.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Note: The following were contributed by employers that offer training for work/life issues as well as a range of experts who work with employers.

Training Objectives

Work/life issues should be set in a context of a business strategy rather than an accommodation to individual needs. Work/life initiatives should be framed as tools for meeting business needs.

Participants should take away from the training: the business case for work/life programs, an understanding of the organization's work/life strategy and clarity on the manager's responsibilities in implementing work/life strategies.

Determine program objectives before developing a manager training program or hiring a vendor. Training programs should promote both factual and attitudinal awareness.

Segment managers into appropriate groups and tailor your program's content to these groups. Training may be more "nuts and bolts" for middle managers and strategic for senior management. The needs of new managers and existing managers may also be different. Consider surveying managers or use your work/life task force to determine content needs.

Training Process

Outline all of the organization's work/life programs (ideally in a handbook) and describe what they are, who should use them, and how they should be used. Stress the bottom-line cost of not utilizing the programs.

Training should allow time for participant's own stories about their personal work/life conflicts and how they have met the challenges, and their successes and failures in creating a supportive work environment. Demonstrated support of managers will make them more open to supporting employees.

Incorporate manager training into existing programs, both formal and informal (e.g., sales training, management committee meetings, management development). It might be useful to "sneak in" training through informal activities—such as inviting opinion leaders to talk about their concerns.

Follow-up

Consider how **ongoing support and coaching** can translate the training into action. Plan to repeat training at appropriate intervals and consider delivering the training through a variety of media. Use existing delivery vehicles (e.g., intranet) when possible to offer mini-modules.

Support should be available for middle managers faced with implementing work/life programs and policies. Managers need opportunities to exchange best practices, clarify details of policies, voice concerns, and get help.

When appropriate, **consider linking manager performance reviews** to support of work/life initiatives.

Organizational Culture

Top management must state unequivocally that they really want their managers to be flexible, supportive and creative about how the job gets done. Without top management support, training becomes a mere "irritant."

Training should be customized to fit the organization's culture and approach to management. Have a realistic assessment of obstacles to implementing work/life initiatives.

Training should make people aware of cultural norms within the organization and how they impact both the business and quality of employees' lives. Managers should learn how to change norms that are counter-productive to achieving both personal and business goals.

MODEL PROGRAMS

Hewlett-Packard, based in Palo Alto, CA with 66,000 U.S. employees, recently piloted a work/life manager training program for two departments: (1) Corporate Diversity and Work/Life and (2) Bay Area Diversity and Work/Life Programs. The one-day course focused on changing work processes to improve productivity and quality while supporting staff needs. The company has plans to roll out the program to other departments in the future.

The Hartford Financial Services Group, based in Hartford, CT, with some 25,000 employees, began offering a voluntary 2_ hour training session for managers on flexible work arrangements in 1998. The course, which is facilitated by HR staff, emphasizes the use of flexible work options as a tool for meeting business needs. Specifics of the eight work arrangements offered by the company are covered; managers are encouraged to focus on the “hows” and “whats” of arrangements rather than the “whys.” In addition, the company offers “lunch and learn” seminars to employees on writing proposals for flexible work options. Education on back-up child care has also been provided on an ad hoc basis.

In 1995, **Texas Instruments**, a Dallas-based company with 20,000 U.S. employees, began offering “Working Smart,” a half-day workshop to all employees, including managers, on flexible work options. The course covers the business case for flexibility, the specifics of the options, and the proposal process. The workshop is being revised to offer tools to help flexible workers be successful with their work arrangements. One positive result of including both managers and employees in the class is that it “gets them talking to each other.”

In 1996, **Merrill Lynch**, a 62,000-employee New York investment firm, introduced both manager and employee training modules for flexible work arrangements. In addition, an “Info-Line” was established to accommodate employee and manager questions and concerns. Fifty HR professionals were also trained so they could assist their business areas with implementing and answering questions about flexible work.

The **University of California at Berkeley** with 15,000 faculty and staff members, offers an optional manager workshop once a year on flexible work options. In 1997/1998, a campus staff organization recognized the contributions of managers in the work/life area with an “Excellence in Management Award” for managers who had enhanced employees’ abilities to integrate work and personal life while maintaining or improving job performance.

MANAGERIAL ACTIONS THAT PROMOTE EFFECTIVE WORK/LIFE INTEGRATION

Principle I: Clarify What’s Important

- Communicate clear vision, goals and performance expectations.
- Listen, understand, and take action to meet diverse employee and business needs.
- Reward performance and productivity, not necessarily time spent working.

Principle II: Recognize and Support the Whole Person

- Build relationships among individuals and group members based on trust and respect.
- Model by living in accordance with one’s own values and by supporting others to live by their’s.
- Value what employees bring to the business from their multiple life roles.
- Seek and promote synergies between business and other priorities.

Principle III: Continually Experiment with the Way Goals Are Achieved

- Question assumptions and encourage creative experimentation in the way work is done.
- Increase organization and employee flexibility through technology and other means.
- Manage organizational change in ways that support work, family, and community.

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