

balance sheets

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

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Center for Work & Family
at Boston College
140 Commonwealth Avenue
St. Clement's Hall, Rm. 128
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467
ph: 617-552-2844
fax: 617-552-2859
cwf@bc.edu
www.bc.edu/centers/cwf/

Midwestern Work-Family
Association
Purdue University
1267 CDFS Bldg., Room 105
West Lafayette, IN 47907
ph: 765-494-6026
fax: 765-496-1144
cff@purdue.edu
www.cfs.purdue.edu/CFF/mwfa.html

One Small Step
The Bay Area Employer
Work & Family Association
221 Main St, Suite 300
San Francisco, CA 94105
ph: 415-808-4315
fax: 415-856-0906
info@onesmallstep.org
www.onesmallstep.org

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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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"Our company offers a Release Time Program that allows our 500 employees to volunteer two hours per week to community initiatives important to them. Because the company endorses participation, we believe employees are able to participate in such activities with a sense of ease...In the end, a little goes a long way."

Jill Taylor-Sullivan,
Director of Human Resources,
The Rockport Company,
Marlboro, MA

"At Silicon Graphics, employees are offered a six-week paid sabbatical every four years. My recent sabbatical gave me an opportunity to focus on me -- indulge in my hobbies, and start a new one. I came back into a new position energized and ready to create. This is absolutely one of the best programs we offer."

Charlotte Anderson,
Manager, Work-Life Initiatives,
Silicon Graphics, Inc.,
Mountain View, CA

*This issue of the Balance Sheets
authored by:*

Judith David & Lori Kinder
MacArthur, One Small Step, and
Elizabeth Hirschhorn Wilson &
Kathy Lynch, Boston College

Time-Off Programs

An authorized leave from work, paid or unpaid, without termination of employment rights. This information sheet focuses on five popular types of programs: (1) sabbaticals, (2) social service leaves, (3) leave sharing for emergency situations, (4) paid leave banks, and (5) family care leaves.

Whether to care for a sick family member, pursue personal interests, bond with a newborn, or volunteer in the community -- many people are wanting more time off from work. In a 1996 work/family poll by Robert Half International, Inc., respondents said they were willing to reduce their work hours and salaries by an average of 21% in order to have more personal time. College recruiters are saying that graduates today are much more concerned about work/life balance than in the past. Recent debates in Congress have focused on whether workers should be able to choose compensatory time off vs. overtime pay, and with increasing frequency there are state efforts to mandate employers to provide time off for a variety of reasons, including parent involvement in school activities and sick leave for family members.

Time-off programs in the workplace have emerged as a natural outgrowth of employees' interest in flexibility. Flexible work schedules address how, when and where work gets done, whereas time-off programs allow employees the time they need to attend to family and personal obligations and interests. Stress and burnout resulting from long hours at work, time-starved relationships at home and dwindling time for personal pursuits are becoming serious concerns from an employee health standpoint.

As with other work/life programs, a supportive organizational culture is essential if time-off programs are to be effectively utilized. Employees' perceptions that their career will suffer if they take time-off, and managers' concerns about increasing productivity demands are among the issues that can be addressed in training programs and communication plans.

THE BUSINESS CASE

Enhance Recruitment: In a 1996 William M. Mercer employer survey, 73% of the respondents identified paid time off as important when recruiting new employees.

Increase Retention: The average employee replacement cost is estimated at 150% of salary. A recent study at the University of Iowa found that new mothers were more likely to return to work if they had longer parental leaves, paid or unpaid, and if they had programs that allowed them to gradually return to full-time work (Working Mother, May 1997).

Improve Community Relations: Programs that allow and encourage employees to take time off to volunteer in the community visibly underscore a company's community commitment and may likely generate positive publicity.

SABBATICALS

Generally, corporate sabbaticals range from two to twelve weeks and are granted based on years of service. The purpose is to provide employees with the opportunity to take extended time away from the workplace to renew their energy and stimulate their creativity. Though a popular benefit, some believe that having key people take sabbaticals in smaller companies can be disruptive to business operations. Other critics argue that few if any employers who offer sabbaticals have quantified the impact on the company's bottom line.

Acuson, based in Mountain View, CA with approximately 1200 employees, offers a five-week paid sabbatical after five years of service.

Lotus Development, a software company with 6,000+ employees, offers four-week sabbaticals to employees in their seventh year of service.

Watson Wyatt Worldwide, an international human resource consulting firm, established a pilot Sabbatical Program in 1997. Approximately 20 "high-performing" associates with over 10 years of service will be eligible to take two to three months off work, with 2/3 of the sabbatical funded by the firm.

SOCIAL SERVICE LEAVES

Social Service Leaves are an allotted amount of time-off, paid or unpaid, to perform volunteer or community service. In some cases, employees must submit an application for such leaves.

AT&T, headquartered in Basking Ridge, NJ, offered each of its 127,000 employees in 1997 one paid day off to volunteer after employee surveys revealed frustration with the lack of time for such work.

Wells Fargo Bank, headquartered in San Francisco, CA with 45,575 employees, provides one to six months of paid leave for volunteer work with a non-profit social service organization. Employees may

apply for a Social Service Leave if they have been a salaried employee with the Bank for over three years and their manager confirms that they are in good standing.

LEAVE-SHARING

Paid time off can disappear quickly when dealing with a catastrophic illness, natural disaster, or other type of serious personal or family crisis. Some employers have created policies which allow employees to voluntarily donate their paid time-off to co-workers in need. These policies are typically highly appreciated by employees.

Silicon Graphics, Inc. began offering an "Emergency Personal Time Donation Plan" in 1997. Employees must submit an application and reason for the emergency, the amount of accrued time they have, and the additional number of hours they will need.

University of California at Berkeley initiated a pilot Leave Share Program in 1996 for staff employees as part of an effort to create a caring environment. Many campus staff expressed a desire to donate vacation leave or compensatory time to co-workers facing a major health crisis, whether their own or that of a family member. Donations are voluntary, irrevocable, anonymous, and must be approved by the donor's and recipient's departments.

PAID LEAVE BANK

Paid Leave Banks, commonly referred to as Paid Time Off (PTO), are programs in which employees are given a single pool of time off to use for vacation, personal time, illnesses, family emergencies, etc.

Many employers have recently converted to leave banks to provide employees with more flexibility and control over their time-off, and to assist managers in scheduling time-off. Employees enjoy the privacy a leave bank offers, as they are able to

take time-off without disclosing the reason. Initially, there may be controversy, as employees may perceive that they are receiving less time-off, and managers may be concerned that employees will take more time-off than before. These concerns can be addressed with careful communication.

Kaiser Permanente's Northern California Region, based in Oakland, established a PTO program for its non-bargaining unit employees in 1997. The previous vacation balance and annual allotment of vacation, floating and birthday holidays, plus three additional days make up an employee's time-off bank, and may be used for any reason.

Texas Instruments established a Time-Off Policy that includes a Time Bank for employee vacation, personal time, funeral/ bereavement leave, and non-occupational illness, injury or maternity leave (first 24 hours). Employees personally manage their Time Bank to meet individual work/life needs.

Watson Wyatt offers employees a PTO program which combines sick leave, personal time and floating holidays into a pool to provide associates with "greater flexibility in using time off for any reason."

FAMILY CARE LEAVE

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 requires employers with 50+ employees to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave a year to care for a newborn or a newly adopted child, or for a serious health condition of an employee or family member. Many employers have policy provisions more generous than what is required by law.

Pacific Telesis Group, a communications company based in San Francisco, CA offers its 46,708 employees up to 12 months unpaid leave, with health insurance for the first six months.

The Hartford Insurance Company, with world headquarters in Hartford, CT, provides those of its 20,000 employees who are eligible with up to 26 weeks of unpaid family and medical leave per rolling 12-month period (some of which may be paid time off via other benefits).