

Work-Life Balance - Introduction

How many times have we heard stories of or seen on television about children waiting patiently for their daddies to arrive on time so that the birthday cake can be finally cut. The child would keep on looking at the door with expectant eyes, hoping his father would rush through the door, a gift in hand, lift him in his arms and wish him a 'Happy Birthday'.



Just as they would be visualizing this dream, up comes the dreadful phone call that says, "Sorry, chap. Bit stuck today in an important meeting at work, but don't worry, I will make it up to you". The parents usually do try to make it up for their kids. However, no barbeque parties and trips to amusement parks will be able to compensate for the extreme loss of self-esteem the child would face, in the hands of the people present there. They would all sympathize, feel sorry or some parents present, might even learn their lesson to be present at their children's birthdays at any cost, but all at the expense of this young man's humiliation.

So, who is to be blamed here, exactly? The father is clearly not an evil man. If anything, he is doing his primary duty - being the breadwinner of the family and putting food on the table, and caring about the necessities. You obviously will not blame the child for being selfish and stupid enough, not to understand this. He has his own emotional reasons for being disappointed to see someone whom he looks up to, not being present on a day he cherishes.

Friends, welcome to the world of "Work-life Balance". Work-life balance teaches us that we all have the right to be ambitious in pursuing our career goals, but not at the cost of losing important emotional and personal ties with people with whom you are going to share relationships with throughout your life.



Work-life balance teaches ways to manage both the different spheres of life by reducing the gap between professional and personal life so much that the dividing line almost disappears.

One of the principal observations of Work-life Balance is that when work becomes a hobby and co-workers become family, there would be sufficient time to give to both career and family.

Harms of an Imbalanced Life

Improper balance in your work commitments and personal responsibilities, more often than not, cause a tremendous stress between both the different sides of a person's life. A person can easily lose focus and direction if his priorities are not well-set and his life oscillates dangerously between his family responsibilities and those at the office.

When the approach is so negative and confused, it will come as little surprise that people who have unhealthy work-style and negligent lifestyle tend to lose productivity with the passing of time.



Overly enthusiastic employees, at the beginning of their professional journeys, often end up messing their personal life in their efforts of meeting the exact and

high standard expected of them at work, either due to their ambition to prove themselves better, or under the stress of securing a job.

It has been observed that both these situations lead to a complete collapse of productivity in the long run. People who sacrifice their personal life to achieve professional success end up neglecting their health and healthy habits like eating healthy food, proper rest, peaceful sleep and engaging in relationships. As a result of this, their health deteriorates and productivity dips significantly.

Work-Life Balance - Quiz

For many people who lead severely imbalanced lives, the self-realization of the fact that they have irreparably ruined their lives comes too late. It's only when someone whom they consider a close friend mentions it to them that they finally think.

Is your life imbalanced? Are you prioritizing certain areas of your life over seemingly irrelevant, yet equally necessary aspects? Take this quiz to find out!

S.No.	Work-Life Balance Quiz Questions	Agree	Disagree
1	I work during my lunch-break.		
2	I never exhaust my vacation leaves.		
3	I haven't missed on family functions mostly.		
4	I don't have enough control over my work life.		
5	I am in control of my temper when in workplace.		
6	I spend sufficient time with my near and dear ones.		
7	I get sufficient time to enjoy my hobbies after work.		
8	I feel exhausted even early in the morning, at times.		
9	I have enough time for myself every day or every week.		

10	I feel relaxed and comfortable only when I reach home.		
11	On many occasions, I have felt over-burdened with work.		
12	My family often complains about the time I spend at work.		
13	Thinking about work comes naturally to me, even during rest.		
14	I often worry about what direction my career is going towards.		
15	I am often guilty of not giving time to everything I would like.		

Quiz Scorecard

Once you are done answering the quiz, count the number of 'Agrees' you get –

- **If your score is between (0 – 5)** – Caution! You are leading a highly imbalanced life. Make significant changes to your life
- **If your score is between (6 – 10)** – Your life is just barely balanced. You are just about managing to give time to all things important in your life. A bit of change is needed for the perfect balance.
- **If your score is between (11 – 15)** – Congratulations! You are absolutely on the right track! Your life is perfectly balanced. Happy living!

Download Try-it yourself sheet.

Work-Life Balance - Benefits

Unhealthy lifestyle can cause a lot of problems in health, family life, relationships and work. Knowing how to maintain a healthy balance not only improves your lifestyle but also increases productivity. There are hundreds of cases wherein it has been observed that improper ways of working has led to poor health, ugly conflicts in domestic life, neglecting household responsibilities, not maintaining family relationships and no time to pursue hobbies.

Benefits of a healthy balance between work and life leads to stronger relationships, as it makes possible spending sufficient amount of time with your family and friends. As a result, people find your company interesting and go out of their way to hear about your issues, and offer suggestions – be it business or personal life. It increases productivity by allowing people enough time to rest and take their minds off work by pursuing their interests and participating in their hobbies. This in return, boosts productivity and creativity.

In addition to increased productivity, a work-life balance also helps in attaining fulfillment in life. When a person begins to give equal importance to all the aspects of life, his happiness level will go up and he will be able to engage with their work with a renewed valor.

How to Get a Balanced Life?

The following list helps you to realize which area of your life you worry about the most and neglect the most, so that you can understand what needs to be done to address those issues.

The table has five essential areas that need to be addressed in order to have a proper work-life balance. After you have read the questions, you can write a short response to them. This will help you identify the next step you must take in your life so that you can give equal importance to all spheres of life and not miss out on any one of them.

Career	Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For how many hours do I work per week? • Do I take my work to complete it back home? • Do I accept work-related calls while at home? 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Relationships	Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I willing to listen in case of a disagreement? • Am I available enough to be a good role model to my children? • Is my work getting affected due to disturbances in personal life? 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Finances	Responses

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I facing debt worries? • Am I ready with my future’s budget yet? • Do I feel comfortable thinking about my finances? 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Body & Health	Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I exercise regularly? • Do I regulate how much caffeine I consume? • What should be the ideal time to sleep and wake up for me? 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Personal & Spiritual Growth	Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I able to schedule time for meditation? • DO I get enough time for self-reflection? • What can I do to strengthen my spiritual consciousness? 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Download Try-it yourself sheet.

Symptoms of an Unbalanced Life

What is the right time to notice an improper trend in the way you are leading your life? What are the things to look out for in a person’s attitude towards his job and family?

It has been widely observed that the first symptom of improper work-life balance is change in weight. People either lose or gain weight drastically due to high fluctuations in their eating habits. These weight and eating disorders are caused due to the absence of any orderly manner of eating healthy food. When you don’t give sufficient thought to what you eat, especially when you are surrounded by junk food, there is every chance that your weight goes out of control.

The second thing to look out for is exhaustion. A person who is not leading a healthy and happy life will always be a victim of exhaustion. If a person spends more time than is necessary at his work when his body needs rest, then he tends to develop partial insomnia, which could lead to dizziness, indigestion, clumsiness, irritation to accidents while driving.

Ill-Effects of an Unhealthy Lifestyle

The worst ill-effect of an unhealthy lifestyle is the stress it puts on emotional attachments. Relationships are worst affected due to insufficient attention as a sacrifice made for work completion. These lead to frequent conflicts, and in many cases, the end of any ties.

It is seen that when employees are asked to provide more output, the results often turn to be counter-productive. A huge decline in quality can be immediately observed. In addition to that, overworked and exhausted employees rush in to apply for sick leaves, which being paid leaves, are a direct cost to the company.



All these factors combine to form a tremendous personal and professional stress-load, eventually resulting in burn-out. People tend to become absent-minded and lethargic, with almost no will to communicate and generally unresponsive.

There is a general lack of interest and people easily slip into depression in these cases. Others become victims of restlessness and get anxiety attacks in the middle of the night. Such people have to rely on heavy medication to relax and get sleep, when they should be able to get relaxation and sleep naturally.

How Workplace Influences Balance

Sophie Borland, who happens to be a health correspondent for the Daily Mail, had once written an article on how overworked the general practitioners are nowadays in US. They have already warned that the patients might have to wait for a month to get an appointment, forget seeing a doctor, at this time next year.

Many companies nowadays actively participate in providing an equal work to life ratio to all of their employees, so that they remain happy and lead healthy satisfied lifestyles, which will directly reflect in their attitude to work and productivity. They understand the risk that pushing employees for a higher production will only yield good results for a short while. But eventually, all employees will quit with the reason quoted being “having no life while working there”.

Companies have now introduced many new and creative measures to give their employees a sense of belongingness to the work place. One of the easiest ways to do this is by simply giving an employee more freedom and control. Many might argue that handing more control to employees could be counter-productive but it is found that when employees have more control in the working of a company, they feel valued and in command.



Innovative steps like flexible timings, job-sharing, tele commuting, working from home and half-day work, have all immensely improved the relation between a company's management and employee. Employee satisfaction goes up when he realizes that this is a company that thinks about him, and will in turn, try and reciprocate by providing his best output. This results in a higher engagement with their work and better focus on productivity. If the performance is purely due to employment reasons, or fear of being treated like a bottom-performer, now the employees will perform well because they believe themselves as a part of the company and not a mere employee.

It is also advisable to ask employees their suggestions in key matters. Many of them are experienced people in their respective sectors, and must have good ideas that they have seen being implemented in other companies. Most managers don't have the time to spare with each employee of the company. Hence, creative ways of taking suggestions and inputs are being implemented in many offices nowadays. The most common of which would be the "Suggestion Box".

Employees might be answerable for only their professional life inside the office, but they all are people with a social life, and might be family persons with various responsibilities and commitments waiting for them back home. There is a big chance that some employee could be lacking in performance owing to certain changes put into his working style by the management, or maybe his productivity has gone down due to certain personal reasons in his life, that may or may not have been because of the work he is in.

In situations like these, the best thing to do is to sit down and have a frank, one-to-one discussion with him. Many managers encourage this way of working. There was a time when a strict hierarchical string of command used to be followed, with pre-determined rules of decorum for people in the senior management.



Nowadays, many of these rules are defunct. The most successful managers of today are so friendly with their team-mates that it is not difficult for any employee to approach them with any personal problem. The most common areas of concern for managers is dealing with co-workers who have emotional, stress-related, health or

financial issues. In addition to these, some also have substance-related problems. The most important thing, managers say, is to be as receptive and be as non-judgmental as possible while dealing with these cases.

This has started the Employee Assistance Programs that have seen tremendous success in the recent years. Employees have hailed programs like these as not only attentive to their needs but acting as the bridge between them and different layers of the management.

Employee referrals and rewarding people for their sincere and good work are all strategies that help an employee feel more at home while working with an organization. Steps like these help people find a connectivity with their co-workers by developing a purpose for their working, as compared to treating them as just employees who are there to do a job.

Many companies have reported a remarkable increase in productivity and output by making only small changes like listening to what the employees have to share with them, and thanking them when they share something useful. It was because it made the employee feel like a part of a family where he can also put his points clearly without worrying about any possible backlash.

Organizing team parties, outdoor camping and birthday celebrations are also some steps that are simple and yet, contribute a lot towards making the workplace comfortable.

Small incentives like praising someone in front of other people for their service, giving people some extra time-off, awarding them for their achievements and offering them promotions have been observed to give a huge emotional and moral boost to people. These perks, if timely, give a lot of impetus to the employees to move forward and produce better quality of work.

Employee-Satisfaction Survey

The following worksheet is a list of statements that have a score-chart of (0-5), where 0 stands for lowest, and 5 stands for highest.

4 is considered a good score, worthy of being a 5, while 3 stands for something that could have been true with a slightly more effort.

Text	0s	1s	2s	3s	4s	5s
The management appreciates new ideas.						

I will stay in this organization for the next 12 months.							
Growth opportunities provided here are satisfactory.							
I am happy with the quality of my output.							
I am satisfied with the product my company produces.							
Employees are treated with respect here.							
There is good teamwork here and everybody helps.							
The team accepts constructive feedback.							
The Management doesn't have unrealistic expectations.							
The company addresses customers' complaints effectively.							
The company addresses employees' concerns effectively.							
It's easy to communicate here.							
Issues get addressed by the direct supervisor immediately.							
My supervisor knows how to identify strengths.							
I get plenty of references to improve my work.							
My supervisor encourages implementing new ideas.							
Performance Evaluations are fair and honest.							

I receive recognition for my efforts.									
I am happy with the training provided to me before the job.									
The working environment is comfortable.									
The management has effective problem solving skills.									
I am provided the tools needed to deliver the best results.									
The salary provided here is extremely competitive.									
The benefits are competitive to other organizations.									
The management offers promotion to deserving candidates.									
The management keeps its commitments to the employees.									
Leadership works in accordance to the company's mission.									
I will recommend a friend to work with this company.									
OVERALL I AM SATISFIED WITH MY JOB.									

Download Try-it yourself sheet.

Time Management Techniques

Many people have an unfair complaint that they do not get enough time to do a lot of stuff that they would love to do. Now, when the President of a country says that, you would agree and say, “that’s a busy man”, but when someone among your friends says that, it doesn’t mean that he has very little time; it’s just that he has very little time management skills.

We have a tendency to get confused between urgent work and important work. When faced with a situation, where you have to choose between a task, which needs to be taken care of urgently, and a task that we understand is very important, we normally are caught unawares trying to figure out what is the priority here.



Urgent tasks like taking printouts or forwarding emails could take your attention and take the focus off from important things. Similarly, saying that you are busy with an important meeting when your boss is waiting on the line to have a conversation with you is also not a pleasant priority to have.

Learning how to compartmentalize these two different sorts of work into our daily routine, so that our urgent tasks do not overlap with important ones and vice versa is the core of time management concepts.

Time Management Matrix

Eisenhower has clearly defined the difference between an urgent task and an important task. This definition is now, considered, the cornerstone of an important classification in time-related jobs.

According to him, urgent tasks are those that gets things into motion and sets a person into action, either mental or physical, immediately. This includes urgent calls, emails, meetings, huddles, getting into a train, replying to abusive messages, etc.

On the other hand, important tasks are those that disclose their value in the long run. They are things that take time to deliver and need mature, relaxed and comprehensive thinking. The reason it takes time to deliver is that it involves many parameters that demand equal time and thought. The emphasis here is on the quality of the action's result.

Compared to this, an urgent action calls for some very specific and limited actions, as the focus is less on quality and more on completing it in a limited time-frame.

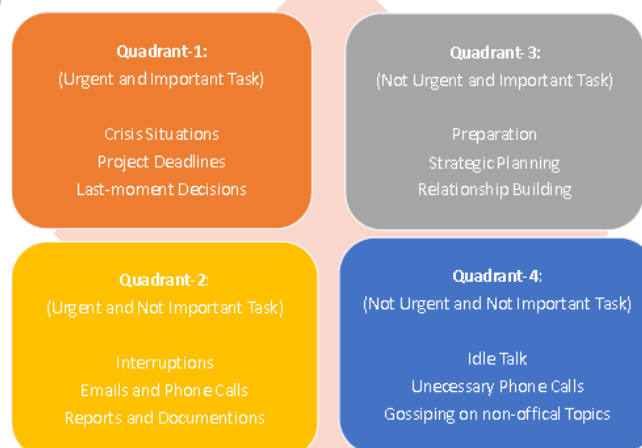
There are situations where an important work could also be an urgent work, however, in an ideal working environment, this is a rare situation.

Keeping this in mind, the tasks can be arranged in a quadrant called the “Urgent vs. Important Quadrant”. According to this, tasks can be divided into four kinds –

- **Quadrant-1** = Urgent and Important Task
- **Quadrant-2** = Urgent and not important Task
- **Quadrant-3** = Not urgent and important Task
- **Quadrant-4** = Not urgent and not important Task

Quadrant-1 – defines tasks that are not only very critical but also need to be done in a period. Handling a crisis situation, disaster management, meeting project deadlines are tasks that stress on high quality output in a tight time-frame.

Quadrant-2 – defines those tasks that might be needed in a short time but might not be important. Tasks like catching the earliest bus on a Friday night, replying to a text message as soon as we get one, making a phone call to colleagues, forwarding emails are urgent but the result need not be too high in quality.



Quadrant-3 – defines tasks that might not be urgent but are very important. Examples like relationship building, strategic planning take a lot of time to be implemented, but are very important.

Quadrant-4 – defines those tasks that are neither urgent, nor important. These include tasks like chatting with friends, gossiping over irrelevant material. They are the real waste of time. Many times, when we say we don't have time to do things that are classified under Quadrants-1, 2, 3 only because they are busy in tasks under quadrant-4.

Work-Life Balance - Setting Goals

The most important objective of setting goals is that it gives you a clear focus and aim, as compared to leading an aimless life. Goals are the fuel that drive your ambition and teaches you to pursue your dreams. This not only helps you to manage your time efficiently but also helps you to prioritize your work in such a way that you meet your targets. To save time sufficiently to spend it on important tasks, we need to know how to say 'no'.

It might sound harsh, but if spoken earnestly and politely, stating all the reasons for it, the other person will be convinced that you are, right now completely focused on meeting your targets, and would appreciate if others appreciate it too.

Knowing how to tactfully, say 'no' to somebody is an art and needs constant practice. An assertive approach is needed to manage cases like this in a proper way. However, the truth is- if you have to find time to address all your concerns, then you have to say 'no' to people.

There are 3 Ps that will help you in getting more goal-oriented. They are –

- **Positivity** – Your goals need to produce a positive, encouraging energy when you think about them. That will give you the drive to achieve them. Goals that are imposed upon you seldom succeed in creating the motivation needed to pursue a goal until its complete execution.
- **Personal** – You need to be personally attached to your goals. The minute you feel the goal you have set for yourself is for realizing somebody else's dream, and not yours, you would stop having any ambition towards its implementation.
- **Possibility** – Your goals shouldn't be too far-fetched. In other words, it should be a gettable or achievable goal. Sketching tall plans for yourself and not meeting the unrealistic expectations only brings self-loathing and depression in the long run.

For your goals to be achievable, there are five qualities that it should have –

- **Specific** – goals must be describable in figures and number, e.g. - 3 chapters a day
- **Mentionable** – goals should invoke a sense of pride on mentioning it to friends.
- **Achievable** – goals must be achievable. Ten chapters a day isn't achievable.
- **Reflective** – goals should be fulfilling a personal need or ambition.
- **Timely** – goals should be achieved within a set time-frame.

Together, these qualities make a goal **SMART!**

Work-Life Balance - Life At Work

Life at work can be stressful, especially for those people who are into the managerial sphere of life. They have a pool of co-workers and they have to delegate work to them. If they don't trust people with the quality of the output, then they could face a lot of stiff decision-making in their line of work.

It's easy to get into stress when working. If the work is getting too burdensome, delegate it to people who can take care of it, till you get some breathing space for yourself from the already crammed schedule.



Breaking up tasks into smaller independent modules is also a very smart thing to do when facing a huge task. Normally, when faced with a task that demands a lot of effort, people tend to procrastinate, i.e. postpone the work off to some later date. This causes further delay and leaves you with even lesser time to complete an already mammoth task.

In addition to all these, getting a realistic target is also extremely important to get the work done in the office. If the target is unachievable, or is very tough to meet then there could be a lot of undue stress and pressure on your head even before you have started with the implementation of any plan for its success.

When asked, working professionals admitted that of all the reasons due to which stress manages to enter into a person's personal life, the most common one is huge stress caused due to targets and performance at work. Many people state that they always carry work back home, despite their not wanting to do so, and that comes in direct conflict with their responsibilities as a family person. Their priorities in their domestic life constantly clashes with that in the professional life and causes long episodes of unhappiness and disturbances.

In such situations, it is imperative to remember that to live a truly balanced life, issues occurring at work place should not spill over to domestic life and vice versa. Life at work is not easy for all. Some are blessed to be working in their dream jobs but majority of us are not that fortunate.

When the workload is plenty and you realize that you just have to lose some steam by venting somewhere, just meet one of your good friends and tell him what you have been feeling recently. He should help you in coping up with the situation and might even offer a timely and effective suggestion.

Try not to take calls and check emails while at home. With constant intrusion of communicative technology in our lives, we are connected to people almost all the time. That does not mean that we keep interacting with all of them at all given times. When you are home, that time belongs to your family. You should respect those commitments too.

In addition to these steps, you must also respect other people's boundaries and expect them to respect yours. If someone doesn't like taking calls late in the night, make sure he doesn't call you up on Sundays when you are busy with your family too, unless of course it's something comparable to national importance!