

OCTOBER IS NATIONAL WORK AND FAMILY MONTH

Fifth annual celebration recognizes the importance of employer-sponsored work/life programs

October marks the 5th annual celebration of National Work & Family Month. Created in 2003 by the U.S. Senate and sponsored by the Alliance for Work-Life Progress (AWLP), it recognizes the importance of employer-sponsored work/life programs in attracting, motivating and retaining top talent.

Once viewed as strictly an employee “perk,” organizations that incorporate work/life programs into their management strategy are finding that they are creating more effective workplaces. Flexible work arrangements provide enhanced employee performance while providing more options for employees.

Ilyse Shapiro, founder of the job search Web site MyPartTimePRO.com concurs. “With an increase in single-parent households and homes where both parents are wage earners, businesses must proactively incorporate work/life programs into their business model to attract and retain top talent. When they do, both businesses and their employees win because they are finding that turnover, absenteeism and stress-related illnesses are reduced while productivity increases.”

Shapiro suggests that businesses consider the following five tips before implementing a work/life balance program:

- 1. Make sure your firm’s culture supports work/life initiatives.** It’s great to tell staff that your organization offers flexibility, but this shouldn’t be just a catchphrase. Management from the top down must embrace and encourage the concept. Then, a formal program should be put in place that is both malleable and continuous.
- 2. Effective work/life balance programs are non-discriminatory.** They consider ALL employees as equals, regardless of sex, race, income level, job title, status (exempt or non-exempt) or family composition (single/married, with/without children).
- 3. Continue career advancement/training opportunities.** Staff who work flexible schedules should be offered the same opportunities for advancement and training as those who work traditional, full-time schedules.
- 4. Don’t pit employees against each other (or against their supervisors).** Many employees fear that they will face repercussions – co-worker animosity, management scrutiny – if they take advantage of flex-time options. Effective supervisors must ensure that their staff does not face this type of feedback.
- 5. Flexibility is a two-way street.** Effective work/life programs must work for both the employees and the employer. They must be a part of everything a firm says and does -- from the mission statement to short- and long-term strategic objectives.

Incorporating a work/life balance program into a firm’s business model proves to be a win-win scenario. “If your organization is not currently addressing work/life issues, it will soon be losing out -- if it isn’t already. Firms which offer flexible work arrangements are able to retain current employees and attract new ones better than firms that do not,” says Shapiro.

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