



STATE OF COLORADO

MANAGER AWARENESS

Creating a Balanced Work Environment

Prepared by the Division of Human Resources in the Department of Personnel & Administration
(Revised January 2004)

Not so very long ago, the expectation was that work was work and home was home, and never the two shall meet. The values of that day are expressed in statements such as “*It’s a personal problem,*” “*They chose to have kids,*” and “*Leave home at home.*” Times have changed and organizational climates are constantly evolving. The resulting balance and often time’s conflict between the personal needs of the employee and the needs of the workplace present a significant challenge to managers.

What has changed?

The workplace has changed significantly due to social, demographic, and economic factors. The workplace is more diverse than ever with four generations in the workforce. It is important that managers realize the vast differences and values of their diverse workforce. Telling one employee that he or she must work overtime may have the same effect as telling another employee he or she cannot work overtime.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% of employees leave the boss, not the job or the pay • Only 15% of top performers report the expectation of monetary awards as a very significant influence on performance • The top five issues for employees across all industries and demographics are consistently: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication with management 2. Relationship with the manager 3. Work-Life balance 4. Career development 5. Compensation and benefits 	<p>#1 issue reported for women is Work-Life balance. The number of female owned businesses is growing at a rate of more than twice all others combined.</p>
---	--

Common practices such as aggressive job benchmarking and readily available pay and benefits data have created similarities in compensation and benefits, especially within a given industry. Compensation and benefits may no longer be the top motivator for employees.

- The definition of a family has changed. Dual career and single parent families are now approximately 68% of the workforce.
- 70% of employees report not having a healthy work-life balance.

- Work problems or issues are three times more likely to spill over into family time than vice versa.
- 85% of U.S. workers live with a family member and have immediate day-to-day family responsibilities.
- The elderly age group is growing faster than all other age groups. When people live longer, their ability for self-care diminishes. For employees, this results in the "sandwich generation" where elders and children are being cared for simultaneously.

- 54 million U.S. workers are involved in caregiving
- The average age of the elder caregiver is 37 (state employees' average age is 45)
- 64% of eldercare givers are employed full-time
- Of those 64%, 40% have both child and eldercare responsibilities
- 40% of the workforce has missed work time due to eldercare responsibilities

Business can suffer the consequence of conflict between work and family, which affects the bottom line. As a public employer, this means all citizens are affected. Absenteeism alone costs American business over \$3 billion annually. Locally, one employer found its cost was \$1 million. The driving reason employers are sensitive to changing values is business needs. Sixty-seven percent of employees report they are three times more likely to quit when there are work-life conflicts. Tardiness, absenteeism, distractions, low morale, turnover, and low productivity because of family concerns affect the state's efficiency and ability to ensure the highest level of citizen service.

There is a new deal in the American workplace. Employers no longer offer life-long job security or other guarantees of a different era. Employers demand productivity, adaptability, skills, and a compatible attitude from employees. Employees demand flexibility and recognition that they have personal needs from their employer. Salary and benefits are not enough - not anymore. Work-life options are becoming the "differentiator" and are an essential component of any successful total compensation program.

Employees are no longer viewed as just an expense, but as the employer's most valuable resource in accomplishing the department's goals. Employees are a long-term human capital investment where the return is productivity as a result of reduced recruitment costs and increased retention. Managers must assume responsibility for dealing with the impact of personal concerns on individual productivity. Ultimately, the organization's success may depend on how effectively managers deal with the challenge of balancing the needs of the work place and employees' personal needs.

Managers cannot be expected to disregard their work objectives in order to accommodate personal employee needs, but they must accept the fact that personal responsibilities are part of their lives and have an impact (positive or negative) on productivity and efficiency. Managers who do not attempt to adjust their management styles can expect to face turnover, recruitment difficulties, absenteeism, and morale and loyalty issues. We are in an era of reform where managers play a key role in shaping the new workplace environment and creating a culture that fosters a healthy work-life balance.

How do managers respond?

Managers need new skills and awareness to utilize the available tools and address the challenge. Some suggestions are provided below.

- Accept that employees' personal responsibilities and diverse values are valid. Employees have life responsibilities outside of work that are largely more important. They are real and cannot be ignored or wished away.
- The key to successfully managing competing demands is to find mutually beneficial solutions. Efforts to accommodate personal demands are often rewarded with employees who try harder, are more motivated and loyal. Managers should be open to negotiation and keep communication flowing.
- Make employees part of the solution – ask what they value. It is important to keep in mind what options are valued by certain employees – there are typically no one-size-fits-all answers. For example, not all employees may excel or desire to be on a flexplace program (telecommuting). Employees are creative adults (that's why you hired them), partner with them in problem resolution and the whole work unit may benefit.
- Plan ahead. Don't wait for a crisis to develop. Both managers and employees can use “what if” lists to help plan for life events. For example, what if the child is sick or school is out?
- Create an open atmosphere that is sensitive to the correlation between performance and personal obligations.
- Make expectations clearly understood. Employees must know the latitude available and the limits set.
- Be aware of employees' individual work styles and behavioral problems that may arise. Keep an ear open for the causes. Informal records help track patterns before difficulties arise.
- Be able to differentiate between occasional vs. chronic problems, and performance vs. personal conflicts. Approach them differently because not all circumstances are the same and interventions and solutions may be different.
- When appropriate, utilize the flexible management tools offered by the state personnel system, including job sharing, flextime, flexplace, dependent care flexible spending accounts, the employee assistance program, family leave, family sick leave, leave sharing, and training opportunities.
- Be able to suggest small practical things to help control the situation in the office. Don't be afraid to try new things. If at first you don't succeed, try, and try again. For example, allow an employee a daily two-minute call to a new child-care provider for a couple of weeks.

Allow employees time to adjust to life events with options such as phased-in return to work and keeping connected to the workplace while on leave.

- Be aware of new programs or options that add innovative tools to a manager's repertoire and ability to deal with the challenge. Possible sources of information and ideas are departmental human resources offices, the Work-Life Program, or the Colorado State Employee Assistance Program.

In the long run, a manager's job is to accomplish the goals of the state and to get the work done as efficiently as possible. Managers need to be flexible and creative, but do not fail to take corrective measures when performance simply isn't up to standards and expectations. The challenge is to help without taking on the burden of the employee - managers are not counselors. The manager who will be most effective in today's workplace is one who deals with the problems of today's diverse workforce. Understanding and accepting different values and creating an environment that helps employees bridge the gap between work and family is a great start.

For additional information, contact your department human resources office. The State Work-Life Program Coordinator can also provide information. Call (303) 866-2391 and ask for help with Work-Life options.