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Work/Life: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?

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WORK/LIFE: WHAT IS IT AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Address to the University of California Work/Life Symposium

Newport Beach, CA

October 22, 1998

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Associate Professor and Director

The Center for Families at Purdue University
- Title Slide

- Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here and to have the opportunity to address such an august body of scholars and leaders.

You know, I’ve heard it said many times that the number one fear is the fear of public speaking. A common recommendation is to imagine your audience in their underwear. As intriguing as that possibility is, I have an even more titillating image in my mind. I’m going to imagine that I never left Indiana and that I am in fact speaking to all the senior administrators at my own university!

I hope, in the time I have with you today, to energize you, to educate you, and to inspire you. I am conscious of the fact that many of you are experts about some or all the issues I’ll discuss, but I hope that my “spin” on the data will be useful to you nonetheless.

- By now, almost everyone knows that America’s workforce has changed. The slide depicts the trend most responsible for this perception – the incredible increase this century in the participation of women, particularly mothers, in the labor force. Although this trend is sometimes ascribed to the post WW2 era, you can see on the slide that there has been a steady increase since 1890 (1). At least half of all working families now have more than one earner (2). The number of families supported solely by women is close to the number supported solely by men (3).

   Amazing as the transformation in women’s labor force participation is, it may pale in comparison to the changes we will see in the coming decades.

- Before I remind you of these changes, let me tell you why I think you should care about them. The Hudson Institute, which incidentally is located in Indiana, predicts that 45 million
jobs will need to be filled during the decade ending in 2005 as a result of economic growth and departures from the labor force. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ moderate (as opposed to high or low) projections, only about 15 million new workers will enter the labor force during that period (4). The number of jobs is predicted to grow about 40% again as fast as the number of job seekers.

We are going to need every worker we can find. We will need every worker to be as productive as possible. We are going to need to compete to attract and retain every worker. It is going to be a buyers’ market for jobs, even more than it is already. We need to make our workplaces ready.

Some recent changes are extensions of longstanding trends in both men’s and women’s employment. As I mentioned, most of the growth in the labor force this century has come from mothers’ entrance. But you can also see that men’s participation has been falling. Although women’s rates will continue to rise, they are converging with those of men, and future growth in the labor force is unlikely to come primarily from these sources (5).

Another change, which will not be a surprise to you, is that the work force is becoming older. In 1995 there were 4.1 people of working age for each person of traditional retirement age. By 2005 this ratio will fall to 2.3—a societal transformation of blinding speed. We will have older workers, who have older parents and relatives (6). There will not only be a smaller proportion of individuals of working age, but also a smaller proportion of individuals to care for them. The fastest growing segment of the U.S. population today is of those 85 and older (7).

Another facet of age is younger workers. I have heard a lot of talk lately about how Generation X workers represent a “new breed.” The 1997 National Study of the Changing
Workforce included a special set of analyses comparing workers aged 18-32 to workers of the same age in 1977. As you can see, there may have been less change than conventional wisdom might suggest (8).

- Generation X workers today do, however, report working harder and faster than their predecessors. They are much more likely to work more than 40 hours per week. They are more likely to report not having enough time to get everything done. Before I go on, let me say a few words about the data source: The National Studies of the Changing Workforce (9) were conducted by The Families and Work Institute in 1992 and 1997 to gather detailed information about work and personal life from large nationally representative samples. Interviews were conducted over the telephone by professional researchers. The 1997 survey was modelled on the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey.

- Finally, none of you will be surprised to know that the workforce will continue to become more ethnically diverse. Asian American and Hispanic workers will occupy increasing percentages of the workforce, while African Americans will remain at about 11% and the percentage of white workers will decline from three-quarters to two-thirds (10).

- Some characteristics of the work force have not changed. Workers today are no less likely to have a spouse or partner than they were 20 years ago, although they are somewhat less likely to be married to their partner. Workers today are no less likely than workers twenty years ago to have children under 18 living at home. And real household income in 1997 did not differ significantly from that in 1977, even though purchasing power had declined substantially (11).

- Family issues cut across the workforce, regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity. Family issues, broadly defined, are still a cornerstone of most peoples’ lives. Workers now and in the
future will have significant caregiving responsibilities. As workers become more diverse, workplaces will need to “morph” to keep them. As workers continue to care for loved ones and family members, we need to do a better job of making it possible for them to also fulfill work responsibilities.

-12 What evidence is there that we aren’t already doing a good job of creating work environments that make it possible for workers to be successful both at work and at home? Considerable recent evidence suggests that families are feeling pinched. As this figure shows, job interference with personal activities and family life has increased significantly in the past twenty years (12). A number of studies have shown that this is not a “women’s issue” — men are, for example, as willing as women to give up pay or benefits for help with dependent care (13). About 1 of every 2 workers is now reporting that their jobs interfere “some or a lot” with their personal lives (14). Over 70% of working mothers and fathers feel they do not have enough time to spend with their children (15).

-13 Tension and interference between work and personal life is costly to employers. At First Tennessee Bank, newly recruited workers report that opportunities for work-family balance are among the top reasons for selecting the job (16).

Baxter Healthcare Corporation, in a large multimethod study of employees, learned that 42% had already looked for another job due to work/life conflicts. Men were significantly MORE likely to have looked than women (17). Exit interviews at IBM reveal that dissatisfaction with work-family balance is ranked as important as dissatisfaction with salary and benefits as a reason for leaving the company (18). In the 1992 National Study of the Changing Workforce, about 1 of 3 working parents reported that they were willing to leave their employers
or trade pay or benefits for assistance with dependent care (19).

Regarding absenteeism and tardiness, the Child Care Action campaign estimates that employers lose $3 billion each year to work time lost to child care, about 6-8 days per year on average per parent (20).

In the Winter 1998 issue of the Sloan Management Review, Ulrich argues that “Intellectual Capital” is a firm’s only appreciable asset but is often undervalued and poorly utilized (21). Complex work which requires workers to make decisions and allows them to feel needed and important, without overwhelming them, not only reduces strain and produces satisfaction, but also can enhance basic intellectual capacities (22). By contrast, work which is stressful or which conflicts with other responsibilities can interfere with intellectual flexibility, and, ultimately, capacity. Universities need to be concerned about the intellectual capacities of their workers.

-14 Here’s where the rubber meets the road for employers: Employees at Baxter Healthcare who reported a lack of support by management regarding work/life conflicts said that they would be less willing to put forth extra effort, specifically: offering suggestions for improvements, volunteering for overtime, acting in an empowered manner, maintaining a positive tone of voice during customer contact, speaking positively about the employer, or exerting more than the minimum effort (23).

-15 The bottom line is that workers’ discretionary effort, perhaps the most valuable resource employers have access to, depends, at least in part, on the degree to which workers feel able to fulfill their responsibilities both on and off the job.

-16 Workplace practices which are responsive to employees’ needs and avoid unnecessarily
disrupting their personal lives have positive implications not only for the employees who are
directly affected, but also for their colleagues, their spouses, and their children. Within
workplaces, responsive policies have effects beyond the actual users of benefits. They affect the
corporate culture by helping to send the message that the employer cares about workers.
Workers get this message even if they have yet to use or need particular benefits (24).

We also know that bad days at work change workers’ later behavior at home. Rena
Repetti’s creative and technically strong studies of air traffic controllers show that fathers tend to
withdraw from family activities at home when they have had a stressful day at work. In
contrast, mothers become more involved and responsive (25). Another innovative study asked
married couples to provide data for 42 consecutive days about daily stresses, and found that both
men and women, but especially women, increase their involvement at home to compensate for
their spouses’ bad days at work and subsequent withdrawal (26).

A recent national study in the Journal of Marriage and the Family estimates that workers
who are 1 standard deviation above the mean in marital distress lose 1.34 days per month of
work more than people with average marriages. The resulting national cost to employers is
estimated at $6.8 billion per year (27).

Finally, mothers and fathers who have “good work” as I described earlier, provide more
stimulating home environments for their children, with more books and magazines, lessons,
hobbies, trips to museums, and other enrichment activities, even when family incomes are low.
Parcel and Menaghan’s definitive longitudinal national studies of the families of young, poor
mothers and fathers showed that children who experienced better home environments performed
better on tests of reading and math achievement (28).
In its February/March issue, the magazine Fast Company answered the question, “What works at work?” by quoting a corporate leader who said, “We actively encourage people to live differently, to work differently. We want people to do things their own way, to find the way that works best for them” (29). Effective organizations will realize what a potent influence they are on workers’ abilities to live and work differently – workers and others are affected, at home and at work, now and in the future.

Addressing the challenges and dilemmas I’ve described so far has become the province of what is now called “Work/life.” Here is what I mean by this term: Strategies, practices, programs, and policies that maximize employees’ abilities to meet business goals and fulfill personal responsibilities, particularly toward dependents. Note that I do not limit my definition just to programs or policies. I also give equal priority to meeting business (or organizational) goals and fulfilling personal responsibilities. Finally, though I do not exclude personal responsibilities not related to family concerns, I privilege care for dependents (30).

The Families and Work Institute has observed four stages in the development of work/life interventions (31). I describe these to you not to suggest a natural developmental sequence, but rather to emphasize where the organizations that have been doing this the longest have ended up today. The rest of us can learn from their progression and get farther faster.

During Stage One, or the Programmatic stage, organizations tend to focus heavily on policies and programs. Often, an urgent need for child care becomes evident, resulting in the implementation of some form of assistance such as vouchers for child care or the provision of on- or near-site child care.

During Stage Two, or Integration, organizations realize that a single program is unlikely
to solve all employees’ work/life needs. Attempts are undertaken to construct a more comprehensive array of programs and to organize them into an integrated package.

Stage Three, or the Strategic stage, emerges when organizations realize that programs and policies are unlikely to be successful if the organizational culture impedes their implementation and undercuts their effectiveness. As a result, efforts to change the culture are the centerpiece of this stage.

During Stage Four, work/life efforts move to the core of the organization, rather than serving simply a support function. I have been very impressed with the work of Pat Brown at First Tennessee bank as an example of this kind of work. The bank has embedded its work/life strategy throughout the functions of the organization, from recruitment and retention, to evaluation of managers, and service to customers.

We don’t yet know exactly what Stage Five will look like – some organizations are just reaching it. But the hints are that organizations will look beyond their own borders to the external community – improving the quality of the workplace by improving the quality of the community.

Now that we know the path others have travelled, it is easier to think about interventions that work from the top down as well as the bottom up.

So far, I have said little that applies uniquely to universities. In 1996 the College and University Work-Family Association commissioned the Families and Work Institute to conduct the first-ever comprehensive study of work/life initiatives on college campuses (32). You will hear later during this conference from Kathleen Sullivan, who is an expert on this research and a past president of the association. This slide lists the programs and policies reported by 40% or
of new mothers (37). The Detroit office of Deloitte and Touche found its family-friendly benefits led to a drop in turnover from 40% to 10%. A 1% improvement in retention levels for managers is worth $5.5 million to that company (38).

At First Tennessee Bank, supervisors rated by their subordinates as supportive of work-family balance retain employees twice as long as the bank’s average. Their departments keep 7% more retail customers. Higher retention rates contributed to a 59% profit gain over two years. They gained 15,000 work days with a financial impact of $1.5M. They fill positions about 30% faster than their competition. As a result, they have been able to keep the total headcount to less than 50% of what they predicted they would now need several years ago – they get more work days from more experienced workers (39).

Finally, an exciting study published earlier this year in the Harvard Business Review describes a strategy implemented to make Sears a “compelling place to work, shop and invest.” Hard data show that a “5 point improvement in employee attitudes will drive a 1.3 point improvement in customer satisfaction, which in turn will drive a 0.5% improvement in revenue growth” (40).

-23 Here are the precise targets of intervention. The bars in this figure show three indicators that together explain about a third to half of the variance in tension between work and family (41). As you can see, tension is indexed by job demands, which have to do with the amount of work, the need to routinely work very hard or very fast, the number of hours it requires and the frequency of travel or overtime with little advance warning. The second component is job quality, which includes autonomy, learning opportunities on the job, the degree to which the job is meaningful, job security, and opportunities for advancement. Higher job quality is associated
with lower tension. The final component is workplace support, which includes a supportive culture and supervisor, positive coworker relations, lack of discrimination, respect received in the workplace, and flexibility. These three aspects of work are much more strongly related to worker outcomes than earnings or access to benefits.

- So what isn’t she telling us?”, I can hear you asking. One potential snag that concerns many employers is the possibility of backlash. The 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce asked questions about this issue (42). About 60% of workers said they would not be resentful if their employers provided work-family benefits that did not benefit them personally. Age, earnings, benefits, and family status were not related to resentment. Employees with less education, lower job status, or who were members of a minority group were most likely to report resentment, but interestingly, employees in flexible and supportive workplaces were less likely than others to report resentment. There are two lessons here: (1) Creating a workplace supportive of work and personal life responsibilities can actually reduce backlash and improve coworker relations. (2) When we look at the most flexible and supportive workplaces, we find that they make as few exclusions as possible based on various “litmus tests” about what constitute legitimate reasons for things – in other words, they make their interventions as inclusive as possible. The NSCW findings echo those of a 1995 study by Grover and Crooker using the General Social Survey, a nationally representative data set (43). The researchers concluded that “people are more attached to organizations that offer family-friendly policies, REGARDLESS OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH PEOPLE MIGHT PERSONALLY BENEFIT FROM THESE POLICIES.”

The other “catch” in the data from the work/life field is that there are relatively few large
scale evaluation studies. Although there are by now many examples of hard data, most studies report on interventions at a single site. And many of the studies conducted by corporations, though rigourous, have not been submitted to the scrutiny of peer review. There is also what someone has called the “file drawer” problem -- as in academia, evaluation studies which show nil or unfavorable results have a harder time seeing the light of day than studies with more jazzy findings. Finally, it is extremely difficult to isolate the effects that are due only to work/life interventions. If each individual factor that is purported to reduce absenteeism did so along with all the other factors, we would have people coming to work long after they were dead!

The Sears data and some other studies are, however, very persuasive. At least two national measurement projects now are underway and should provide interesting results over the coming years.

Now I’m going to step out of my role as the expert researcher for a minute and step into my role as a university employee. Like many of you, I have spent more than half of my life on college campuses. When I think about work/life interventions and what I know about universities, here are some things I think universities might need to work on. First is equity. As is also true in the business world, concern about work/life issues has focused almost exclusively on relatively privileged professional workers – the campus equivalent is the faculty. Consider this: Earners raise their income, on average, about 30 percent for each graduate degree they obtain (44). Among families in which a member has a doctorate, most are in the top 20% of American family incomes. In contrast, among families in which the head of the household has no more than a high school diploma, most earn less than $30,000 per year. This group of families includes many of the clerical and service workers on college campuses. Even if their
employers were to offer benefits programs such as flexible spending accounts, optional
insurance coverage, subsidized child care, or retirement savings plans, such employees might not
have the “extra” money necessary to take advantage of them. I recently became aware of an
institution that had examined its salary distribution relative to the “living wage” for the county in
which it was located. The living wage was calculated as the hourly earnings that former welfare
recipients would need to earn in order to stay completely off public assistance. Twenty nine
percent of the full-time year round employees at that university earned less than a living wage.
This disturbs me. Universities are, in part, about social justice. Yet the justice on campus can
be very unevenly distributed.

Another area I think universities need to tackle is “mixed messages.” By this I mean the
often conflicting messages that travel down and through the organization about what is really
important. Mixed messages come from supervisors who say, “This university might have flex
time but no unit of mine has flextime.” Mixed messages also come through the performance
evaluation process. Recognition and compensation decisions tell workers what the organization
really thinks is important, regardless of what it says. When the messages conveyed by
compensation are brought into line with, for example, goals for organizational effectiveness and
work/life interventions, real change becomes much more possible. One of the best examples of
this from the corporate world is trying to break the conviction that “face time” – time that
workers are on the job – is a good indication of performance. Learning to define performance
objectives, then basing evaluation on those objectives instead of time, is a challenge that
organizations are probably going to have to master in the new work world that is coming.

Leadership is another challenge for universities (45). If leaders don’t “walk the walk,”
let alone talk the talk, employees know it and are less likely to change. In a study I just completed for the Sloan Foundation, we heard stories about organizational leaders over and over again. Some of these stories were negative – the boss who said she supported work-life balance but sent her subordinates email at three in the morning without recognizing the pressure they would feel to respond immediately. But many others were positive – the boss who explicitly acknowledges the importance of the care workers provide for their families in his monthly messages. If leaders can’t get on board with these initiatives, it will be harder for everyone else to do it.

Universities will have to compile their own business case for work/life interventions. The data from the campuses is still sketchy and I know there can be great skepticism about the degree to which something learned in the corporate world will apply in the “hallowed halls.” The College and University Work-Family Association has begun this work and I hope they continue.

Finally, many universities have yet to move to, and beyond, programs and policies. As workplaces, universities historically have many attractive features. They often compete well with businesses when it comes to leave policies, for example. Many universities have offered at least some on-site child care for many years – our center at Purdue recently celebrated its 75th anniversary. But universities also struggle with inertia, as do many businesses. They carry a tremendous weight of accumulated bureaucracy. And they are often slow to change. These will be our challenges as we move forward.

-26  Hopefully, you all are about to embark on processes of organizational change. One of the prerequisites for effective change is being able to visualize the “ideal end-state.” Luckily, a
group of experienced leaders in the work/life field have already spent considerable time pondering an answer to this question. They developed a set of “principles of excellence;” listed here are the four major categories of excellence (46).

“The employer recognizes the strategic value of addressing work and personal life issues.” Employers who endorse this value are committed to addressing work/life issues as a long-term investment, not a short-term fix. They see work/life at the core, not the fringes, of the organization.

“The work environment supports individual work and personal life effectiveness.” Employers who wish to create such a work environment strive for continuous improvement and address organizational culture issues as part of their work/life intervention.

“The management of work and personal life effectiveness is a shared responsibility between employer and employee.” The vision for shared responsibility also includes shared accountability.

“The employer develops relationships to enhance external work and personal life resources.” Employers have participated in many exciting partnerships with local communities and governments at all levels to maximize the resources available to employees and others, as well as the benefit to the employer.

27 Now I want to share with you some models that might help you in your deliberations later today. The study I cited earlier that Baxter Healthcare Corporation conducted offers a number of provocative findings. Though not subjected to peer review, I think the multiple methods used were generally rigorous and the sample was respectable – about 1000 workers. These workers are not representative of the labor force, however – they tend to be better-paid
and more educated than the average worker.

This pyramid depicts one set of findings (47). The responses from employees revealed that some aspects of the work experience were defined as “entitlements” and some were defined as “benefits.” What is considered an entitlement versus a benefit varies from workplace to workplace – it is embedded in the organizational culture. But the point of the diagram is that the return on investments in work/life interventions, and the risk associated with those investments, depends upon which component we are considering. As the authors of the study explain: “those components which are perceived as an entitlement will not, when addressed, provide a positive return to the organization because employees believe they are “owed” those components and should not have to be grateful for them. However, not addressing the components which are perceived as an entitlement is a potential risk for the organization. Employees who believed they did not have the components to which they are entitled reported turnover, apathy, low productivity, vandalism, or sabotage, self-focus, and an unwillingness to go the extra mile.”

“Those components which are perceived as a benefit have a high return on investment when they are addressed. However, similar to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, the benefits will not be perceived as benefits unless the entitlements are in place. Without the entitlements, the benefits will be perceived as “lip service.”

This slide depicts the views of Baxter employees (48). Respect is seen as an entitlement and programs as a benefit, with Balance and Flexibility falling in between. Employees feel disrespected, for example, when rules seem to indicate mistrust, when expectations seem arbitrary or inequitable, or when their time or effort is not respected. Attendance policies and accountability are often sometimes examples of disrespect. The pain experienced by employees
increases as the pressures or violations of expectations move down the pyramid to the entitlements perceived as most fundamental.

-29 Here is another visual image to organize our thinking. I'm discovering this semester that trees are good metaphors for many things, which is why you have been seeing photographs of trees in my slides. Here I depict the roots of the tree as strategies. Without a strong set of roots, the tree will not survive. Even when some trees are cut down to a stump, the roots push up new growth and life persists. But if the roots die, nothing else can survive for long. The roots give the tree stability and nourishment, and they determine its long term health. If organizational leaders are not strategic about their efforts, long-term success is unlikely. Their tree will fail to thrive.

The trunk and the vessels within it are the pipeline between the roots and the upper reaches of the tree, or the practices which bring life to the organization. If the trunk is somehow damaged or constricted, it can't deliver the full richness of the nutrients from the roots to the leaves. If supervisors and managers do not carry forward the richness of the vision of their leaders, the organization will not flourish.

Branches represent policies, the structure of the organization. They give it shape and definition. But without leaves or a supply of nutrients from below, branches aren't much to look at and they don't do much.

Leaves are like programs, the most easily visible and appealing features of the tree and of work/life interventions. They are important for long term survival, but their appearance will vary from season to season. Some of them will drop off and new ones will emerge.

-30 So how do we achieve the kind of excellence in work-life that these images suggest? I
have several suggestions. Aim for interventions that are structurally and substantively comprehensive. Use information well. Leaders at all levels, lead. Find synergy with organizational goals. Use both carrots and sticks to nurture organizational change. And finally, question assumptions about work. I'll say a bit more about each of these.

Substantive comprehensiveness refers to the depth and breadth of issues addressed by work/life interventions (49). As I mentioned earlier, virtually every worker – male and female, married and single, young and old -- has important personal responsibilities. Structural comprehensiveness refers to the degree to which work/life strategies are embedded at the core of the organization, as opposed to out on the fringes.

Related to comprehensiveness is the use of information. The initiatives I have found the most exciting are the ones with tight feedback loops. For example, First Tennessee Bank is using data obtained from its studies of the characteristics of competent and supportive supervisors to restructure its selection criteria for hiring new workers (50). Baxter Healthcare regularly administers a “Climate for Service” survey in which members of the organization at all levels provide feedback about the degree to which their superiors are facilitating their ability to provide the best possible service (51). Managers know their scores, and the specific items where their scores are highest and lowest. They even know how they stack up against their peers. And if they make changes, they very quickly get information from below about their impact.

Leaders, lead! And look for synergy with organizational goals. I can offer you a really good example that is home grown. Here is a quote by the recently-retired CEO of Eli Lilly and Company, Randy Tobias: "You can ask people to leave their personal lives at the factory fence—in the old days, that was the culture of most corporations – but you're just kidding yourself if you
think they can comply. You can’t hire part of a person. You get the sore back along with the skillful hands. You get the anxious heart along with the educate brain. So, your policies and programs will only be effective if they bow to this reality and address the whole human being. The bottom line is that our efforts to support employees’ work-family priorities are good business. These are neither ‘perks’ nor ‘giveaways.’ These tools will help us attract, motivate, and retain people who are more likely to be more dedicated, more focused, more innovative, and more productive” (52). Eli Lilly corporation regularly appears on the Working Mother 100 list, made the top 10 this year, and received the CEO award a couple of years ago.

-33 Don’t forget the carrots or the sticks (53).

Celebrate successes. Make sure the workplace community knows about the situations where flexibility is working well, or where a supervisor has demonstrated excellence in both supportiveness and effectiveness. Offer incentives to encourage the timid to get involved.

But don’t forget the sticks. Hold managers and supervisors accountable. If these interventions are not important enough to you as leaders to make tangible in some way, they won’t be important to a very busy group of front-line supervisors.

-34 American workplaces today operate on the basis of several assumptions, some of which might be listed here (54). The guy who writes the Dilbert cartoon has made a fortune playing off of these assumptions. In one of my favourite panels, Catbert the Evil HR Director is speaking to a worker. “Alice,” he says, “The experts say you need to balance work and home life. You worked 80 hours last week. <pause> That’s less than half of the hours in a week – give us some balance, you selfish hag!” (55)

Lotte Bailyn and her colleagues demonstrated impressive enhancements to organizational
effectiveness in a recent study for the Ford Foundation (56). They threw out these old
assumptions about workers and work and used one key question to launch their organizational
change efforts. This question made it possible for employees to propose new ways of working
that took into account both their strong expertise in how to do their jobs better, and the
complexity of the responsibilities they were juggling. The question allowed workers to put the
previously taboo subject of family responsibilities on the table. In my mind, invoking this
simple question represents not only a way to make change, but also a hopeful vision for a brave
new world of work and family. I leave it with you and wish you well as you move forward.

-35 Here is is: What is it about the way work gets done around there that makes it difficult or
easy to juggle work and personal life so that neither one suffers?

I thank you for your kind attention.

Questions?
References


51. Alice Campbell, personal communication, 1998


WORK/LIFE: WHAT IS IT AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?
Address to the University of California Work/Life Symposium
Newport Beach, CA
October 22, 1998
by
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WHAT IS WORK/LIFE AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?
"TAKE-HOME" POINTS

➢ Workers’ performance depends in important ways on the quality of their experiences at work and their ability to fulfill personal responsibilities.

➢ The connection between workers’ performance and work experiences is likely to strengthen in the coming decades, presenting significant challenges for employers who expect to recruit and retain skilled workers.

➢ Tension between work and personal responsibilities is negatively related to the quality of marital and parental relationships, as well as to the intellectual capacity and performance of the individual worker.

➢ Tension between work and personal responsibilities may be reduced by a variety of strategies, with positive implications for workers’ morale, attendance, recruitment and retention, and other indicators of performance. It can be difficult, however, to determine the proportion of performance that is uniquely attributable to work/life interventions.

➢ There is little significant evidence that “backlash” results from interventions to reduce tension between work and personal responsibilities.

➢ Contrary to some conventional wisdom, universities are neither uniformly behind corporations in their interest or action regarding work/life strategies, nor without significant resources to implement such strategies.

➢ Work/life programs and policies are only one, and arguably not the most fundamentally important, component of interventions to reduce tension between work and personal responsibilities. Successful and lasting interventions address the core functioning of the organization.

➢ Successful change efforts address not only programs, policies, and practices, but the culture of the organization itself.

Information about how to obtain a complete transcript and reference list for this address is available from Bruce Goya in the University of California Office of the President. This information also can be obtained from the speaker:

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The Center for Families
Purdue University

"The simple idea that everyone needs a reasonable amount of challenging work in his or her life, and also a personal life, complete with non-competitive leisure, has never really taken hold"
Judith Martin, Common Courtesy, 1985
The Labor Force has Changed...

More changes are coming, and we had better be ready!
The (R)evolution in Labor Force Participation


Husbands' actual participation
Mens' actual participation with projections

Wives' actual participation
Womens' actual participation with projections

Aging workers, aging elders...

1990 2005

25-64 25-64
51.8% 47.4%

65 and older
12.6%
20.2%

4.1 younger people per older person 2.3 younger people per older person
Compared to workers of the same age (18-32) twenty years ago, "Generation X" workers are:

- EQUALLY likely to have spouses or partners (though less likely to be married)
- EQUALLY likely to be parents: 4 in 10 have children under 18
- MORE likely to have spouses or partners who are employed

Compared to young workers two decades ago, today's "Gen X" workers report working harder and faster and not having enough time to get everything done.
Increasing ethnic diversity...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Asian non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Black non-Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
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<td>2020</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>68</td>
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But some things have not changed...
- Workers now are just as likely to have a partner (65%), though are less likely to be married.
- Workers now are just as likely to have children under 18 living at home (46%).
- Real household income in 1997 was not significantly higher than in 1977.
"Four out of five U.S. wage and salaried workers live with family members and, therefore, have immediate, day-to-day family responsibilities off the job."

"Nearly one in five employed parents is single, and among employed single parents, one out of four is a man."

(Source: The 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce, p. 25)
Employers pay for tension between work and personal life...

Recruitment
Retention
Tardiness & absenteeism
Intellectual capacity

The rubber meets the road: Employees who are less willing to...

- offer suggestions for improvements
- volunteer for overtime
- act in an empowered manner
- maintain a positive tone of voice during customer contact
- speak positively about the employer
- exert more than minimum effort
"We spend so much time in our work and in work-related activities that our awareness and out perceptions become narrower and narrower....We have taken a rainbow and compressed it into a solid, uninteresting beam of light."

Anne Wilson Schaef,
Meditations for Women Who Do Too Much
1990

The circle is wide...
"We need love and creative imagination to do constructive work."

Paula Ollendorf
Das Jahr des jüdischen Frauenbundes
1928

What is “work/life”?

Strategies, practices, programs, & policies that maximize employees’ abilities to:

meet business goals

&

fulfill personal responsibilities, particularly toward dependents

(Source: Shelley M. MacDermid, 1998)
Stages of Development

Programmatic

Integrated

Strategic

Fundamental

But what about universities?

- Alternative work schedules
- Employee Assistance programs
- Wellness programs
- Handbook on work-family policies
- Child care centers
- Manager training
- Relocation services
- Elder care resource and referral
- Designated work-family staff
The Tension Recipe

- Job demands
- Job quality
- Workplace support

What’s the catch?

- Isolating effects
- Backlash?
“Growth Areas” for Universities

- Equity
- Mixed messages
- Leadership
- The “Business case”
- Moving to, then beyond, programs and policies

What’s the “ideal end-state”?

- The employer recognizes the strategic value of addressing work and personal life issues
- The work environment supports individual work and personal life effectiveness
- The management of work and personal life effectiveness is a shared responsibility between employer and employee
- The employer develops relationships to enhance external work and personal life resources
How do we get there?

- Aim to be both substantively and structurally comprehensive
- Use information well
- Leaders at all levels must lead
- Find synergy with organizational goals
- Carrots and sticks
- Question assumptions about work
Instead of this:

- *Keep your personal problems at home*
- *Give them an inch and they will take a mile*
- *Equity means the same for everyone*
- *Benefit programs cannot make people more productive*
- *Presence = performance*
- *Hours = output*
How about this?

What is it about the way work gets done around here that makes it difficult or easy to juggle work and personal life so that neither one suffers?