



In her 1980 Grammy award winning song, 9 to 5, country singer, Dolly Parton, wrote and sang about the challenges working women faced when climbing the corporate ladder. Today, nothing much has changed except that more executives, both men and women, are putting in longer hours into the rat race to fulfil their career ambitions. And it is not unusual for busy executives to clock in more than 10 hours in a typical workday. As a result, many pay a price with their personal lives.

A recent survey found that what working professionals want most is a work-life balance. In today's competitive environment, many are pressured to work longer and find it challenging to strike a balance between work and life. Nevertheless, it is still possible to achieve a healthy dose of work-life balance if one is committed to make it happen.

Get your priorities right

Sometimes, when we are so overwhelmed by work, we forget about the commitments that we have promised our families and friends. We take it for granted that they would understand our situation for missing a birthday party or graduation performance. Unfortunately, this is not the case especially when you try to explain to your 5-year-old daughter why you missed her ballet performance.

The fundamental issue here is that we have to prioritise the important matters in our lives. Child? Spouse? Religion or Sports? While we work to live, we do not live to work. Once we are aware of our priorities, chances are we will make efforts to adjust our work schedule to accommodate them in our lives.

Find the right support

Most of us fail to recognise that communication with our employers does help in achieving a successful work-life balance. For those executives who face difficulties in committing to work

full time, try exploring options such as flexi-work arrangements or compressed workweek with your employers. Let them know that you are willing to commit 100% at work but you have other personal commitments to fulfil as well.

Learn to ask for help. Many would agree that it would be near impossible to juggle family and work if not for the support of friends, loved ones, and an understanding employer. As we advance in our careers, there will be times when we will be caught in situations where one priority takes precedence over another. This is when we seek help and understanding from our support group. Whether it be asking a friend to baby-sit your child or for the understanding of your employer that your family needs you more, it is crucial that you ask for assistance.

Focus, focus, focus

We can be more productive at work and probably avoid working late if we remove distractions at work. Diversions like on-going MSN chats and reading personal emails in the office are counter-productive to your work. Furthermore, many senior executives get bogged down by issues which they can and should delegate to their subordinates. By delegating, it frees up your time and allows you to focus on the more strategic issues which require more of your attention.

Besides work, we are also deviated by trivial stuff during our free time. Once we prioritise our activities, we need to stay focused and avoid spending too much time on unconstructive activities. It's like choosing between attending a family dinner and watching a soccer match on television. While the latter brings 90 minutes of pure adrenaline and enjoyment, the former strengthens family bonds amongst your family members.

Rest & Relax

With so much demanding our time and attention, an increasing number of us are experiencing harmful effects such as stress, fatigue and insomnia. Give yourself some personal time and space where you are able to relax by doing something that you really enjoy. It could be gardening, going to the gym or a movie with your spouse. Set aside some time each week to enjoy these activities. Your personal time allows you to recharge and be ready for the new challenges.

Work-life balance is not a myth. It is achievable but it requires conscious effort and is a continuous process. Demand on your time changes and you will need to re-examine your priorities from time to time. And if you are managing people, it is even more important for you to walk the talk. In the long-run, work-life balance will help you develop both professionally and personally.

This article is contributed by Mr Josh Goh, Assistant Director, Corporate Services, The GMP Group.

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