

Work-life Blend is the New Work-Life Balance: How to Make it a Priority in Our Organisation



Work-life balance would be great if it worked the way we intended. Achieving the high ideal of work-life balance assumes that there is a natural separation between work and life and that the two can be grouped into distinct sections.

Covid-19 has shown this up. It's more common for team members to be heard on calls with kids or dogs in the background. Nowadays we take meetings from cars while running errands, or we get to tasks in the dead of night when everyone is asleep. Is there really a natural separation between work and life?

More and more, we feel like when we're at work, our personal lives creep in, and when we're at home, we can't forget about work.

The different parts of our lives are almost impossible to separate from each other. With always-on technology, our jobs, social, and personal lives are all integrated into one whole.

This is why the term work-life *blend* is proving more viable than work-life balance. The idea of a blend is to combine and fuse together the different aspects of our lives in a more natural and achievable way.

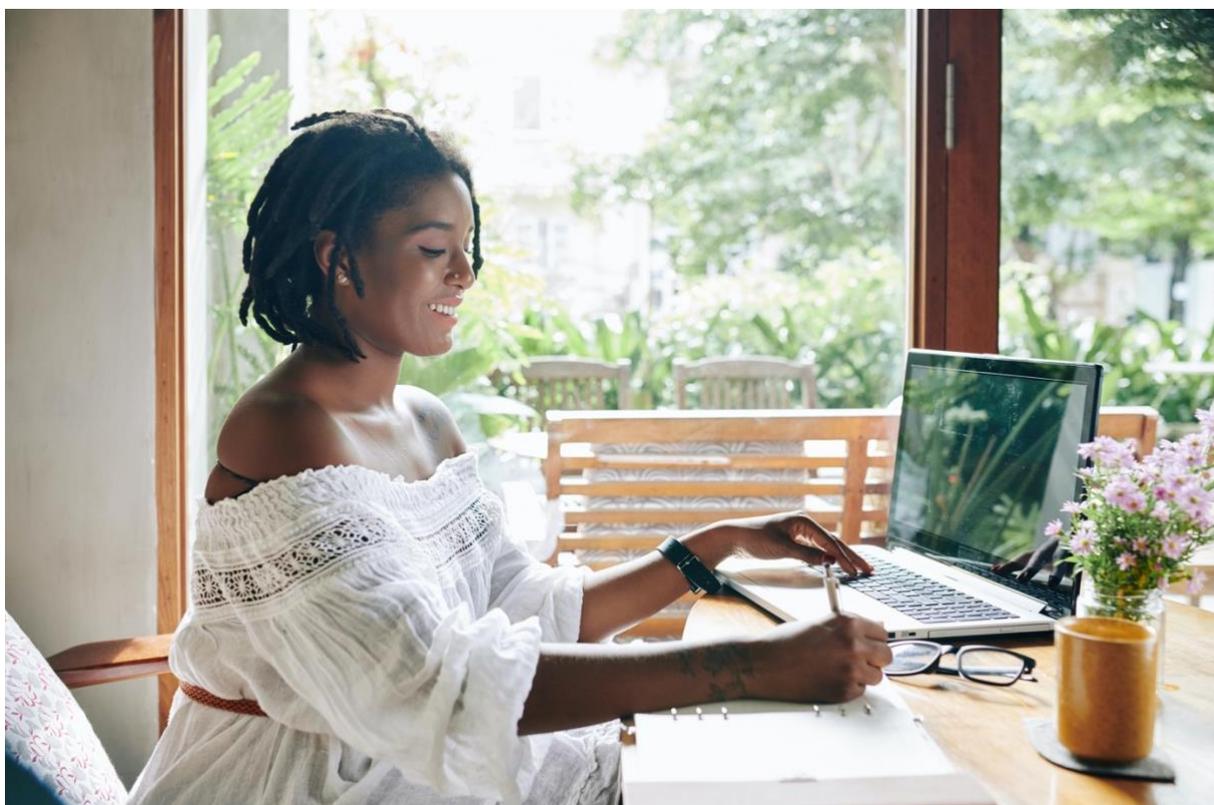


Businesswoman Ariana Huffington has said, “*work-life balance is a myth*”. [Her idea](#) is that trying to be good at every single aspect of our lives comes at the expense of rest, healthy eating, exercise, and downtime. In the end, we’d try to fit everything in but find that we are not truly effective at any one thing.

We may be losing the work-life balance battle. [Harvard researchers estimate](#) that in the US alone, \$190 billion in healthcare can be traced to the stress of trying to achieve that elusive work-life balance. We’ve seen that our quest for this unrealistic ideal actually leads to more employee absenteeism, higher turnover, and lower productivity.

In this blog post, we demonstrate that work-life blend is a much more realistic ideal to work towards. We also give practical advice and tips on how it can be achieved.

The first steps to achieving work-life blend



Achieving work-life blend starts with us. As champions of this change, we need to make sure that we understand and model the new behaviours so that the rest of the organisation can follow. They say that habit-forming takes time and discipline. Let’s talk about what we can do collectively and individually:



1. Acknowledge the need for a blend

The first step is acknowledgment. In the age of Covid-19, we'd all need to come to terms with the fact that life is messy and interconnected, and people are not robots. Leading a perfectly balanced life is not always possible.

2. Know what's important

This is such a valuable approach. One of the biggest challenges that people face is trying to fit everything in. But, in order to succeed, maybe we just need to learn what's important.

We'd need to understand the main components of our day—be it exercise, self-reflection, or family time. Then, make sure we keep our list manageable and treat ticking off each item as seriously as we would a work task.

3. Create space to succeed

Once we know what matters most to us, we need to be sure to carve out the time and space to achieve it. If we have boxed in our time and we have set a priority for these items, we will be more likely to succeed at making them happen.



4. Monitor progress

As mindful employees, we should always check in to see how our plans are working. We might have created categories that are important to us—parent, spouse, manager, self. If we identify clear actions around what needs to be done to be successful at achieving each of these, then monitoring it regularly is a good idea.

5. Understand that it takes time

Work-life blend will not be achieved with a snap of the fingers. We need to realise and accept this. With constant tweaking and adjustment, things can get to the correct ratio. Once it all falls into place, the benefits will be amazing.

Which companies are doing work-life blend well?



The team at Ultimate Software surveyed their employees and [came to understand](#) that most of them were striving for a blend that took into account their personal obligations. Some staff needed to leave work slightly earlier to do the school run, while others needed to go a doctor's appointment or run an errand. Doesn't this sound like pretty much every company out there?

Kathleen Pai, VP of People at Ultimate Software said, "*Work-life balance implies we should carve out specific (equal) time for work and for life, and the two should rarely*



or never intersect... Work-life blend instead means you don't always have to designate set time, energy, or focus for just work or just life, but that you can ultimately find fulfilment in a healthy, steady incorporation of both".

The UK money-management company Monzo understood that rested, well-travelled, and refreshed employees were more valuable to the organisation. Monzo [decided to offer](#) an additional month of unpaid leave for staff pursuing personal projects such as travelling abroad or learning a new language.

Consumer goods giant Unilever offered [40 weeks maternity leave](#) and 90 days paid adoptive leave, making it easier for new parents to blend work and life without worrying about job security.

More and more companies have come to realize the powerful effect they can have on their employees if they foster blended and supportive environments. As a company, we totally buy into this idea, and we'll be trying to get it right all the time. There is no established playbook for which incentives and initiatives work, but we are on a mission to be smart and try different things.

Understanding the role of our managers in encouraging work-life blend



Our managers have a key role to play in creating the new work-life blend. Managers should get to know their employees better. Who are they as people? What are their families and communities like? It's only by having these conversations that



managers can create team calendars and norms that put work-life blend at the centre. Responsible managers will prioritise and hype-up the cross-training of staff so they can collaboratively fill in when colleagues are away.

As we've said before, managers are advised to make healthy choices of their own because they are role models to their teams. Managers can forge healthy environments by simply not emailing team members at night, taking family leave of their own, and keeping realistic working hours for staff to emulate.

Practical actions to achieve work-life blend

There is no exhaustive list on how to achieve a flexible working policy as each team and each market is different. But we have to take this seriously or we understand that top talent will become impatient. We might all be surprised at the positive results of throwing out old rules. Here are some tips for low-hanging fruit actions to begin with:

1. Be flexible

There are so many more ways to be flexible. Some companies offer remote-working options, flexible shifts, and interchangeable schedules. This way, staff gain more control over their time, which boosts morale and cohesion.

Conclusion

Work-life blend does not mean that everything is happening at once. It simply points to finding a way to combine all the important pieces of life. It's going to take time and effort to move away from the doomed ideal of perfect work-life equilibrium. Driving for work-life blend is messy, hard, and time-consuming. But in the end, you'll find it to be worth it.

2. Measure outputs

We should all try to look at performance quality over method. People have different work styles, pacing, and habits. Where possible, don't miss the opportunity to reward smart work over hard work. The perfect example of this is allowing staff to use their time on other things (even personal errands) if they have completed their work early.

3. Communities work well

Fostering stronger team bonds by going out on team-building activities is not new. People come closer together and merge into communities when they do what they enjoy, such as games, music, and other hobbies. It's never been more relevant than today to push for community creation by bringing more fun into the office. You'd be surprised to find out how much engaged work communities feel less stressed, more socialized, and more productive.

4. Talk to your people

This never gets old. Seeking out and deploying employee insights is a powerful way to achieve work-life blend. This is because employees who feel valued and involved come to care more about their work environments. They look forward to taking part at work and they feel better able to blend their personal commitments with the professional requirements of the workplace.