Work-Life Balance

Inspire Workplaces Calendar, August 2021

A healthy work-life balance is important, not only for our productivity and performance, but also for our mental and physical health.

In the past year and a half our world has changed, and so too have our attitudes towards our work.

In the midst of a global health crisis, we've balanced personal responsibilities with work priorities, we have adapted to change while navigating uncertainty, and faced challenges at home while discovering new ways of working.

What does a healthy work-life balance look like in 2021 and how can we maintain it?

HOMEWORKING AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Working from home and flexible working are now the norm for many – and may remain for the foreseeable future. What might that impact be on our work-life balance?

Research by the *Future Strategy Club* has shown that more than half (52%) of employees now enjoy a better work-life balance after working from home due to the pandemic. The research also showed that 40% realised that they had a poor work-life balance prior to Covid-19 and would not be returning to it.[i]

These attitudes are supported by recent analysis by the *Office of National Statistics* showing that overall, people felt that the main advantage of homeworking was "an improvement to work-life balance".[ii]

We don't of course all share the same experience. The recent *Sign of the Times survey by Behaviour in Ireland* showed that over half (54%) found it difficult to separate

their work and personal life when working from home, with nearly half (48%) acknowledging that they get more work done when they are in the office.[iii]

Further research shows that maintaining a work-life balance continues to be of concern in 2021. The recent *'2021 Global Wellbeing Survey' by Aon* carried out by Ipsos reported that work-life balance is the top wellbeing issue that Irish employers are concerned about, followed by mental health and burnout.[iv]

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF AN UNHEALTHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

According to a survey by the *Mental Health Foundation*, nearly two thirds of employees have experienced a negative effect on their personal life, including lack of personal development, physical and mental health problems, poor relationships and poor home life. Moreover, when working long hours, more than a quarter of employees feel depressed (27%), one third feel anxious (34%) and more than half feel irritable (58%).[v]

With the increasing prevalence of an 'always on culture', combined with the blurred lines between work and home and the personal impacts of Covid-19, we may also find ourselves at an increased risk of **burnout**. Burnout is a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress and occurs when we feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained and unable to meet constant demands.

> For more on Burnout and a range of mental health and wellbeing areas, visit the Inspire Support Hub resource library: **www.inspiresupporthub.org**

HOW TO MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE

A healthy work-life balance will look different to each of us, and how we approach it will depend on our personal circumstances. **It's important therefore to find what works for you**. For a little inspiration, we asked some of the Inspire team what they've been doing to help maintain their own work-life balance:

PLAN AHEAD

"I tend to plan my week. I find that if I make arrangements to do something after work, I'm more likely to stick to it and finish when I'm supposed to. This helps me to make the most of my free time and maintain a healthy work-life balance."

DON'T COMPARE YOURSELF WITH OTHERS

"Our work routine and how we decide to spend our time outside of work will vary from person to person. With so many options, especially during the summer months I find it useful to take some time to reflect on what I enjoy and make a conscious effort to include it somewhere in my daily or weekly life. Doing this helps to keep me motivated and upbeat."

AVOID THE TEMPTATION TO WORK LATE

"It can be challenging to get the balance right. Just recently I've set an alarm on my phone for 4.45pm to remind me to try and start wrapping things up for the day...it's a work in progress, but it's certainly helped me to finish work at a reasonable time and not let my work spill into my personal time."

SEPARATE YOUR WORK AND LIVING SPACES

"For the first few months of lockdown I worked at a table in my living room. I found it difficult to completely switch off in the evenings because I saw that room as a work space, rather than a place to relax. I invested in a desk and moved to a spare room and now find it much easier to separate the two in my mind once I log off."

STAY ACTIVE

"Most days, as soon as the clock hits 17:00, I will head out for a run. I find that this immediately clears my mind and puts me in a much better mood. Doing something active, having been sedentary for most of the day, is, I think, very important."

"Ever since the original lockdown I like to go the park every morning before work for a walk, it's like my new commute! Taking some form of exercise is also a great way of making time for myself."

"I try and move every hour. I get up from my desk and walk around for 5 minutes. Also what would have been my commute time home, I now try and use this time to exercise or walk the dog."

TAKE A BREAK

"It took me a while to feel comfortable taking breaks during the day – I felt like I always had to be at my laptop or have my phone with me in case I got an email or a call. My partner and I now use the kitchen as break out room and make a point of catching up over a coffee to check in on each other."

A FEW MORE IDEAS...

SWITCH OFF

Technology now makes it possible to be connected 24/7, but also makes it easier to keep unsociable working hours if we let it. Make the evening your time. Don't be tempted to check your emails into the night or first thing in the morning. When you close your laptop or put your work phone away, keep them away and switched off.

MAINTAIN A ROUTINE

When your home and your place of work are one in the same, maintaining a healthy routine can be a challenge. Try going to bed and getting up at the usual time. Structure your day as if you are in work and plan your working day to help manage your time most effectively.

PRIORITISE

Learn when are you at your most productive and capitalise on those periods, completing any jobs that tend to take a long time to ensure you can free up time during the day to focus on other priorities if you need to.

References:

i www.employeebenefits.co.uk/52-of-uk-employees-enjoy-a-better-work-life-balance-after-home-working/
ii www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employ-mentandemployeetypes/articles/businessandindividualattitudestoward-sthefutureofhomeworkinguk/apriltomay2021
iii www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/the-truth-about-working-from-home-it-s-the-first-time-i-ve-ever-burnt-out-1.4519933
iv www.independent.ie/regionals/corkman/lifestyle/work-life-balan-cethe-top-wellbeing-issue-40499315.html
v www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/w/work-life-balance

Further reading:

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/how-to-be-mentally-healthy-at-work/work-and-stress/#DifficultWorkLife-Balance
www.roche.com/careers/our-locations/asia/india/service/folder/20_tips_for_maintain.htm