

Workplace

Is work-life balance myth or necessity?

By Shanika Best

Work-life balance has been touted many times over the millenniums, but the lyric increased immensely as we entered the COVID-19 pandemic. Home and work boundaries became even more clouded as work was happening at home.

If ever there was a time for balance it was at that time, but the reality of it seemed impossible! As we move through another chapter, we must ask ourselves in retrospect: What really is work-life balance? Is it a myth or is it a necessity?

First let us look at what we know; research over the years, outlined the following; employees who do not have a work-life balance, burn-out quickly; those with a healthy balance have more motivation and are more productive at work. Having a healthy work-life balance is essential for one's health and well-being. Working over 40 hours a week can be stressful, but it can be even more stressful to try and balance family life with demanding job responsibilities. Having a healthy work-life balance will also give you more time to spend with your family.

Not a myth

We know this information and therefore, it starts to shape our thinking, towards work-life balance being a necessity and not a myth. However, let us pause for a second to explore the framework that has incited considerations towards work-life balance being a myth.

As technology continues to evolve, there is an increasing need to always be connected where everything must be facilitated in real-time. Even if extraneous; we feel a desire to be "in the know" and to respond instantly. Authors Ryan Holiday and Stephen Hanselman put it in this way, in their publication of *The Daily Stoic – 366 Meditations On Wisdom, Perseverance And The Art Of Living*. They described our world as hyper-connected and outlined some of the dangers to one who is trying to live a stoic lifestyle that includes the



Individuals should choose and strive to continuously maintain a work-life balance. (Internet image)

balance we are considering now. To reiterate Holiday and Hanselman's perspective, this instantaneous mentality is contributing to the blurred lines between all areas of our lives contributing to the myth factor in work-life balance. A good example is a developing trend where, we no longer maintain email etiquette, once before there was a 48-hour window for the addressee to respond, that is now replaced with the "urgent crisis" where everything now is urgent or in crisis mode.

An additional effect in the myth factor of work-life balance is that we choose the "treadmill mentality" and opt not to participate in the balance we are referring to. This underscores an important point in deciding whether work-life balance is a myth or necessity, which is that choice is an essential part of it, but we are not there yet.

Let us circle back, to what we know again; the first as we said is that employees who do not have a work-life balance tend to burn out more quickly but those with a healthy balance have more motivation and are more productive at work. Consequently, why is it then, that we would choose the less promising option. Would we not prefer to be motivated and productive? Avoiding burn-out and contributing to healthy



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employees? This underscores the necessity of maintaining the health and wellness of our employees.

Many employers are early to the party and have benefited from the motivated and productive phenomenon of employees. You may ask, how? Many employers have implemented policies; allowing and wellness programmes that contribute to productive and motivated employees. The initiatives are limitless and only need selection based on your organisational culture.

However, some employers, are like that one friend who is forever on their way to the party and arrives only just before it ends; and have not found the blend that lends to work-life balance. However, no matter where you fall now on the spectrum, there is still the opportunity to evaluate and improve. Ask yourself, is my culture leaning more on the myth side or necessity side.

Can be stressful

The final look at what we know, encapsulates that working over 40 hours a week can be stressful, but having a healthy work-life balance will allow more time with family. While we are short on time and can certainly ventilate this topic more, I wish to hammer home on the point of choice; If we do not choose it, then we will be constantly making excuses to its impossibility? Statistics don't lie: those who rest and recover are more productive, alert, and high functioning in the workplace. What does this mean?

Based on our review here, the supposition is that work-life balance being a myth or necessity can both exist and be true at the same time. On the one hand, it can be a myth for anyone who is struggling with the inability to balance and on the other hand, the facts of necessity exist and are real as well. However, the recommended consensus would be that we choose and strive to continuously maintain the balance. First choosing to balance, refraining from glamorising a work culture of exhaustion and finally determination to improve, regardless of where you are on the spectrum.

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