

Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

THE WORK – LIFE BALANCING ACT

You will have heard the story of the career husband who arrives home and his son asks his wife- “mummy, who is that man?” For some, the story is less of a joke. This week I was in Kampala and met up with a Kenyan friend who has been commuting between his family in Nairobi and his job in Kampala for the last two years. His family includes two small children. There were other ‘halves of couples’ that I met there whose home base is still Nairobi.

These could be discounted as extreme cases, but in today’s global and increasingly competitive career market, they are prime examples of how hard it is to find a perfect work/life balance. The irony is that these cases work so hard for the family they get little time to enjoy. For the most part, such long distance families do fine, but the support of the spouse is critically important to a person’s career. Often that support includes the willingness to move and sacrifice their own careers in the process. When women get posted abroad it is important that their husbands’ do not resent their success.

However, there is no denying that for many an imbalance between work and life leads to resentment, anger and misery about the job and lack of family time. Such a situation has negative knock-ons in terms of health, relationships and (full circle) performance on the job. There are some organizations that are notorious for condemning the need for a work/life balance for their staff, but interestingly, there are others who are driven to imbalance not by their employers but by their own personalities, attitudes and sense of importance that they place on the role of work in defining themselves.

Some personalities are mentally ‘on the job’ even when at home. Two people may work the same long hours, but the person that loves their job will not feel stressed compared to a person that does not.

Situations vary, but there is no doubt that job satisfaction combined with a supportive work environment that acknowledges the need for a life outside of work (promoting family, sport or hobby time) leads to lower stress and a happier workplace in general- and an atmosphere where things get done. On our deathbeds we are not going to wish we spent more time in the office- we’ll regret not having enough time with those we love.

So how can you work out your work/life balance? There are 168 hours in the week, of which you’ll sleep away around 48 hours. That leaves 120 hours, and ideally there should be a 50-50 work/life split of those 120 hours.

What tips can we use to make this easier? Get your children’s school calendar well in advance and book into your diary/give notice to the boss on those all important sports and prize days. Before joining an organization, find out more from a present or past employee on their attitude towards work/life balance and try your utmost to accept positions only with those who promote a balance. Trust the work team around you enough to delegate tasks to them. Don’t ignore it when your spouse moans at you about over working- it is a serious warning sign! Turn off your mobile whilst on holiday and always make time for those that mean the most.

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