



Whole-Life Balance



Whole-life Balance – what does this mean to you? If you see it as just another new slant on that old chestnut, work-life balance, then you may be in for a refreshing surprise. Also, if you are thinking there is nothing in the idea that can be of any benefit to your organisation, read on. *Whole-life balance* is a way of living that allows everyone to give of their best all the time. It allows your most critical activities to be addressed by motivated people to deliver greater success.

There are many issues attached to the idea of work-life balance which make it work against the conditions it is trying to establish:

- It creates a dichotomy separating work from life, and suggests that you can only do one or the other
- It implies that work and life are of equal size and value, and that this is true for everybody
- It makes people feel guilty about doing work when they're elsewhere and about doing other things when they're at work
- It encourages barriers around that precious entity called work: no private calls, reading or use of the internet, "stop chatting and get back to work", long-hours cultures, etc. These barriers tend to let work spread to other parts of life, but stop anything else 'infecting' work

Whole-life Balance looks at the whole issue of getting the best out of people from a different perspective which is both pragmatic and holistic:

- It views life as a whole, with work as just one of many parts

- It allows these different parts to be of different sizes and have different values, and for everyone to have a different mix of parts in different proportions
- It makes people feel happy to do work when they're elsewhere and to do other things when they're at work; and to mix any other parts of their life
- It discourages the formation of barriers around any individual part of life, particularly the work part
- It looks at the whole of life and asks the question "what is the best way to fit everything in?" It allows people to build their lives like complex jigsaws, not having to continually cut the pieces to fit

So, how can taking a *Whole-life Balance* approach provide benefits to the organisation?

Fundamentally, people have more than one thing going on in their heads at any one time. Some people are able to push the non-immediate ones aside and focus on what they are currently doing; other people find this more difficult. In either case, those thoughts not being dealt with will continue to try and find their way to the surface until the time is right to deal with them. The amount distraction and disruption this process causes can be significant, especially when it is added up over the course of a day, a year or a whole career.

Think of watching a film on DVD with no remote control. What happens when the telephone rings, or the door bell, or if the toilet beckons?

If the film is a good one, you'll try to ignore the interruption and concentrate on the action. However, these interruptions can be persistent and will eventually take your mind off the film and may take you away altogether. Now think about what can be done with a remote control – as the interruption happens, you can simply press pause, deal with it properly, and then continue with the film.

To help people order their lives in a way which makes real space for them to focus on their work, involves allowing them to deal with their other thoughts more effectively when they occur. This means that when they are working, they are fully focused on what they are doing. It also means that they are more willing to deal with their work thoughts more effectively when they occur at other times. All this improves productivity in the workplace and provides extra productivity outside.

Overall, the *Whole-life Balance* approach allows people to accomplish more in their lives, as they become more practiced at dealing effectively with those interrupting thoughts in all the different parts of their life – including work.

Creating a *Whole-life Balance* culture requires the establishment of some core principles within a well defined framework.

This provides clarity for everyone involved, and ensures that the policies and processes of the organisation are aligned with the new culture, allowing the resulting benefits to be monitored.