

Workplace

The importance of work-life balance

By Althea Browne

"If I could, I would have changed how things were done!" Unfortunately, this is the cry of many people who are looking in the rear-view mirror of life. This is the lament of the burned out, the depressed and the stressed who did not practice effective work-life balance.

What exactly is work-life balance? In the words of Dr Liji Thomas, News Medical Life Sciences, work-life balance can be defined as, "an individual's ability to meet their work and family commitments as well as other non-work responsibilities and activities".

Some may view work and life as separate weights on a scale but we should think of work as a part of life. All of us are given the gift of 86 400 seconds each day and how we use this resource determines if we achieve the best in every sphere of our lives.

Work-life balance is one of the areas covered in the Barbados' Best Employers (BBE) opinion survey. The survey seeks to assess, through the responses of employees, the existence of factors that purposefully support work-life balance. Employees are required to rate: the organisation's flexibility with respect to family, personal responsibilities and work arrangements, the provision of employee assistance and wellness programmes and the existence of family leave policies.

The 2020 BBE results revealed that some of the finalists provided the following to their employees: flexibility with respect to family and personal responsibilities, access to employee assistance programmes and information on health and wellness. It is of interest to note that these finalists did not have a counsellor or nutritionist on staff but ensured that their employees had access to these services.

Mental health concern

As a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health and wellness are understandably areas of concern. There is a need, more now than ever, for organisations to have employee assistance and wellness programmes in place.

As defined by The Society for Human Resource Management, "an employer-sponsored employee assistance plan is a work-based intervention programme designed to identify and assist employees in resolving personal problems that may be adversely affecting their performance at work, such as marital, financial or emotional problems, family issues or substance or alcohol misuse".

Many employees are struggling to cope with



the changing environment – hybrid work environments, home schooling and for some reduced pay. Access to confidential, one-on-one professional counselling can help employees to cope and remain productive within the work environment.

Workplace wellness programmes, on the other hand, are intended to promote or improve the health and fitness of employees. Programmes typically include activities such as gym membership, exercise regimens, weight loss competitions, nutritional tips, recipes and other general activities to improve health and wellness.

Prior to the pandemic, the team at Caribbean Catalyst Inc. participated in fitness and "drink more water" challenges, and had professionals speak on aspects of health (non-communicable diseases) and nutrition. During the pandemic since we are all now working remotely, our wellness programme has focused on encouraging each other to remain active. We also used the services of a certified health and safety professional to assess the work stations of all employees to ensure that they were ergonomically correct.

So how can you maintain work-life balance?

1. Set and maintain boundaries – This is very important especially in a hybrid or remote work environment. Many have shared that they are working longer and harder in this current environment. I recommend you have a start and finish time just as you did in a physical workplace.

2. Engage in weekly planning – This will help to ensure that you are meeting required goals or targets and will eliminate the stress of trying to complete last minute assignments or tasks.

3. Schedule you in your diary – Set aside time for activities that you enjoy and that refresh you. For example, going to the gym, walking or even spending time with family and friends.

4. Learn to say "No" when necessary – I have always heard that, "he who does not know what is on his "plate" will be used by those who do". We need to know when we have reached our capacity. As you may be aware, ability does



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not equal capacity. Sometimes, for whatever reason, we have difficulty saying "no", often at the expense of our health and well-being. I, however, hasten to add that I believe in growth opportunities, stretching ourselves to learn and do more. Growth, more often than not, occurs when we move outside of our comfort zone. This is where balance comes in. We need to be aware of when we move beyond capacity to a place of stress and ultimately burnout.

To put it simply, prioritise what is truly important in your life. Work-life balance is an important aspect of a healthy work environment, a prerequisite for a more productive and engaged workforce.

"There is never enough time to do everything, but there is always enough time to do the most important thing" – Brian Tracy Canadian-American motivational public speaker and self-development author.

Remember you owe it to yourself, your family and your employer to find work-life balance so that you can be true to who you are, enjoy your family and focus on adding value to your organisation.

For more information on the BBE 2022 programme, please visit our website www.caribbeancatalyst.com.

Althea Browne is senior consultant Caribbean Catalyst Inc. The company is founder and Organiser of the biennial Barbados' Best Employers programme, which is sponsored by The Nation Group.