

Work-Life Balance: How you can support your employees

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Work-life balance is a concept that holds different meanings for different individuals. While some associate it with working fewer hours, others believe flexibility is key. However, the common thread is the desire for a balance that allows individuals to excel professionally and personally. Employers must understand the significance of work-life balance and their role in supporting employees to achieve it. This article will explore employees' legal rights, the duty of care employers have, and strategies to promote work-life balance.

Understanding Employees' Statutory Rights

Employees have certain statutory rights that employers must uphold to ensure a healthy work-life balance. These rights, outlined in the Working Time Regulations 1998, include rest periods, paid holiday entitlement, and limitations on working hours.

Rest Periods

To promote employee wellbeing, employers must allow their workers the following rest periods:

- 11 hours of uninterrupted rest per day.
- 24 hours of uninterrupted rest per week (or 48 hours per fortnight).
- A rest break of 20 minutes when working more than six hours per day.

It is important to note that there are limited exemptions to these rights, and workers cannot contract out of them.

Paid Holiday Entitlement

Most employees who fall within the legal definition of a worker are entitled to 5.6 weeks (28 days) of paid holiday each year, pro-rated for part-time workers. This

entitlement ensures employees can take time off and rejuvenate, contributing to a better work-life balance.

Limitations on Working Hours

To protect the health and safety of workers, employers must ensure that each employee's average working time, including overtime and work with other employers, does not exceed 48 hours per week. While many employees opt out of this provision, conscientious employers should consider the legislation's original intent – safeguarding workers' wellbeing.

By adhering to these statutory rights, employers create an environment that promotes work-life balance and protects the health and safety of their employees.

The Employer's Duty of Care

Employers have a duty of care towards their employees, extending to their health, safety, and overall wellbeing. This duty includes ensuring that employees are not working excessive hours, as research has linked long working hours and excessive workload to mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Employers must recognise and address these concerns, as mental health conditions can be classified as disabilities.

When mental health conditions qualify as disabilities, employers may be required to make reasonable adjustments to support employees, such as reducing their hours or workload. Failure to make these adjustments can result in claims of disability discrimination and constructive dismissal. Employers also face the risk of accidents or further mental health issues arising from excessive working hours.

Ensuring healthy working practices helps fulfil legal obligations, enhances job satisfaction, increases employee productivity, and fosters a positive work environment.

By prioritising work-life balance, employers can build loyalty, improve employee retention, and contribute to the overall success of their organisation.

Strategies to Support Work-Life Balance

Employers can implement various strategies and practices to support employees in achieving a healthy work-life balance. Here are some examples:

Regular Communication and Workload Management

Regular communication with employees is essential to ensure that their workload is achievable and that they complete their tasks within a reasonable amount of time. Managers should engage in conversations to understand any additional support employees may require, which may contribute to a better work-life balance.

Monitoring working hours and team email flow can also help identify potential issues. Managers should be mindful of the times emails are being sent and have open discussions with their teams about working hours.

Flexible Working Arrangements

Implementing flexible working arrangements can significantly contribute to work-life balance. Employers can consider provisions such as:

- **Flexitime:** Allowing employees to choose their start and finish times within defined core hours.
- **Remote Work:** Enabling employees to work from home or other locations to accommodate personal needs.
- **Reduced Hours:** Offering part-time options or job-sharing arrangements.
- **Compressed Work Week:** Allowing employees to work longer hours over fewer days.

Employers empower employees to manage their work and personal responsibilities by providing flexibility.

Conclusion

Work-life balance is pivotal for wellbeing and productivity. Employers, bound by legal and ethical responsibility, must support employees. Upholding statutory rights, fulfilling the duty of care, and implementing balance-promoting strategies create a positive work environment. Prioritising work-life balance benefits individuals and contributes to organisational success.

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Note: This article is not legal advice; it provides information of general interest about current legal issues.

