

WORK AND LIFE:

HOW EMPLOYERS MAKE ROOM FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Takeaway Points

- Work-life issues generally fall into these categories: scheduling, health and wellness, child care, and personal development and growth.
- In your job search, you should bring up the subject of work-life benefits only after an employer offers you a job, unless the person who interviews you brings it up first.
- Before you accept an offer, be clear about the employer's work-life benefit offerings and negotiate for those that are most important to you.

By: Team Pongo

John Lennon once said: "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." Yes, sometimes life happens. And when it does, it's critical to have understanding employers who acknowledge and accommodate your needs. Occasionally, we all need to neglect work a bit to focus on life - and vice versa. If both parties respect that fact, everyone benefits.

Consider, for example, the added stress these employees would face in an inflexible work atmosphere:

- The expectant mother in the late stages of pregnancy
- The parent of a child with special needs, or one who's having disciplinary problems in school, or who's playing in an afternoon soccer game
- The cancer patient who needs time off for treatment
- The caregiver of an aging parent with deteriorating health

When you're looking for a new job, it's important to find an employer who has the empathy (and policies) to ensure your personal responsibilities won't always take a back seat to your professional duties.

Work-life issues are generally grouped into the following categories. To find the right balance for your lifestyle, review ways in which your prospective employers can accommodate these issues:

1. Scheduling

Depending on the job, this may be the easiest way for employers to accommodate employees, since the costs are minimal while the payback – happier, more productive staff – can be immense. The most popular options are:

- **Telecommuting:** Working all or part of the week from home. (Good for any one whose job is mainly computer-based)
- **Job Sharing:** Two or more people working part time to share a full-time role. (Good for people in customer service or administrative roles)
- **Compressed Workweeks:** Working four 10-hour days, for example, to get an extra weekday off.

Some companies even offer amenities such as onsite concierge services, meal preparation, or dry cleaning, to make the employee's home life a bit easier to manage.

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Did you know?

The Pongo Blog (<http://www.pongoresume.com/blogs/1/pongo.cfm>) offers real-time tips and advice on maintaining a work-life balance in the Work/Life section.

2. Health and Wellness

Employer-subsidized **health insurance** is a widely offered benefit. But since an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, as well as potentially lower premiums, some employers have **onsite gyms** or **discounted gym memberships**. Other employers take this issue a step further with **onsite wellness programs**, some of which include diet workshops.

Another benefit that can help keep personal issues under control is an **Employee-Assistance Program (EAP)**. Common areas an EAP covers include: confidential help finding child or elder care; alcohol or substance abuse treatment; or mental health care.

3. Child Care

Full-time working parents want to feel comfortable with those who watch their kids during the workday. Having access to onsite or near-site child care can raise that comfort level significantly.

4. Personal Development and Growth

This is a key indicator of how important career growth and employee retention are to a company. Internally, formal **mentoring programs** and **company-paid training** by outside experts or at industry conferences can help employees gain needed skills to improve performance in their current roles, or move up to higher-level positions that carry more responsibility and higher salaries. For employees who want to obtain degrees, certifications, or specialized training, some employers offer **tuition reimbursement**. This is particularly useful for those who never attended college, didn’t complete their degree requirements, or want to attend graduate school while someone else picks up all or part of the tab.

Addressing Benefits in Your Job Search

Asking about work-life issues during your first interview is risky, since you may give the impression that you’re asking, “What’s in it for me?” when you should be saying, “Here’s what I can do for you!” In general, you should bring up the subject of work-life benefits *only* after an employer offers you a job. If you want a basic idea beforehand, some employers have information on benefits listed in the career section of their web sites. Or, the person who interviews you may broach the subject when you meet.

Finally, before you accept an employment offer, be very clear about the employer’s work-life benefit offerings and negotiate for those that are most important to you.

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