



EAP NEWSLETTER

*Managing Employee Health
and Performance*

What's Inside:

2

Striking a Balance

An interview with Christine Potvin, Vice President of Disability Risk Management, Health and Wellness, Standard Life

3

Team Players

An article featuring:
Kim MacFarlane,
Product Manager,
Group Marketing,
Manulife Financial

and

Craig Thompson,
Vice President,
Business Development
Wilson Banwell-Human
Solutions™

The Rescue Relay

Taking on work-life balance and other employee challenges isn't a solo effort for employers—or their EAP and insurer partners—any more.

No employee is an island. Scenes from the average office bear this out: family vacation photos top desks, employees rush from late-afternoon meetings to pick up children, while others stay late to meet deadlines. So, too, do figures tracking the relationship between employees, their work and their lives outside of work. A recent ISR survey of 200,000 U.S. workers found that job demands seriously interfered with the family lives of 34% of respondents. Family issues account for 41% of absences, according to a CCH/Harris Interactive survey of human resources executives.

With the fallout of multitasking workers landing on employers—the Conference Board of Canada puts the price tag of work-life balance struggles at \$2.7 billion in lost time—they are offering more and more services to provide some kind of ballast. But even they aren't going it alone. Judging from the way these companies—big and small—

are teaming up with Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and insurers, to bring wellness programs, counselling services, childcare and eldercare options to employees, the recognition that partnerships pay off extends to all levels of the workplace.

In the following pages, The EAP Newsletter turns to workplace health and disability experts Christine Potvin, vice president of disability risk management, health and wellness at Standard Life; Kim MacFarlane, product manager, group marketing at Manulife Financial and Craig Thompson, vice president of business development at Wilson Banwell, to examine the employer response to work-life challenges and how partnerships are yielding even better solutions for employees.

Sponsored by



 **Manulife Financial**

Wilson Banwell
Human Solutions™

Striking A Balance

With employees stretched between the competing demands of work and home, flexible schedules, telecommuting and leave options can help them maintain balance.

Last year, teacher Diane Bisentin spent the year travelling through Europe instead of in the classroom. She wasn't skipping class. She was on sabbatical, taking advantage of her school board's "four over five" program that allows teachers to earn a reduced income for four years so they can take the fifth year off. It's something more employers are considering as they try to keep employee work-life balance on an even keel. EAP Newsletter turned to Christine Potvin, Vice-President of Disability Risk Management, Health and Wellness at Standard Life, for a look at work-life balance efforts—and their payoff—in the workplace.

What are employers doing to address work-life balance?

Employer response to work-life balance falls into four broad categories. The first includes flexible work schedule options—compressed workweeks, part-time work, telecommuting, job-sharing, flextime and summer schedules. The second category covers childcare and eldercare initiatives, such as on-site daycare centres, parental leave and referral services. The third includes special leave for educational purposes, sabbaticals, floater days and progressive retirement programs. The last category covers such options as training, 'buying' vacation days and EAP programs.

How many Canadian employers offer such initiatives?

An increasing number of Canadian employers offer one or more flexible work schedule options. According to a Conference Board of Canada study (Bachmann, 2000), 88% of employers offered flex schedules in 1999, compared to 49% in 1989, and 81% of employers offered part-time work options. In 1999, 48% of employers offered a compressed workweek and 50% offered telecommuting,

as compared to 28% and 11% respectively in 1989. And 52% of employers offered job-sharing in 1999, versus only 19% in 1989.

Are work-life balance initiatives offered as part of an enhanced benefits package?

For maximum effectiveness, it's important that work-life balance options be designed and offered as part of an overall employee benefits strategy. Companies must first understand the needs of their employees and ask themselves what they want to accomplish. Do they want to reduce disability costs? Attract and retain employees? In this way, the work-life balance initiatives they implement are likely to have the maximum impact for their organisation. These steps are often skipped.

How can employers be sure their work-life balance program will match the needs of their employees?

First, they have to look at measurable trends, for example, demographics, claims experience and absenteeism. Then qualitative information can be gathered through a full survey or a focus group that allows employees to exchange information with the employer.

Studies seem to indicate that employees are demanding more work-life balance.

Are employers aware of the workplace issues involved?

Even though employers are increasingly aware of work-life balance issues, there is still a gap between employer perception and the actual need. A Watson Wyatt study (Strategic Rewards, 1999/2000) reported that 42% of top-performing employees cited work-life balance as the key reason for leaving their workplace. The same study showed that employers perceived work-life balance as accounting for only 15% of employee decisions



Christine Potvin
Vice President
Standard Life

to leave the workplace. In today's environment, with employers increasingly concerned about attracting and retaining staff, everyone should be more aware of these issues.

How can these work-life balance initiatives benefit both parties?

To maximize the benefits on both sides, you need senior management commitment. Senior management must be aware of the financial impact of work-life balance on the organization, implement a change management strategy and clearly communicate new work-life balance programs. With good programs, organizations should see improvements in hiring and retention rates, increased productivity and increased shareholder value.

What is the financial impact of not having work-life balance programs?

According to Watson Wyatt, the direct cost of absenteeism and disability represents 7.1% of total compensation and indirect costs add up to another 9.9%.

How can EAP providers play a role in work-life balance programs?

EAP providers are primarily involved in the fourth category—offering counselling and wellness programs. We still don't measure their impact enough, but their work is important in preventing disability, particularly with regard to mental health issues.