



Rebecca Hart left a PR job for a home-based business to spend more time with her family. Her philosophy is "work to live, not live to work."

BALANCING ACT

Management and employees strive for healthy corporate culture

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Not too long ago, the focus of Rebecca Hart's life was her fast-paced job with a local public relations firm and the time she spent with her equally hardworking husband.

Then came Jacob — and all the wonders and rediscovery of life that come with child rearing. Being in the fast track wasn't as appealing anymore, and Hart decided to restructure her priorities.

She became a home-based consultant. Gone were the days she ran out the door at 7 a.m. for an early meeting. And she wouldn't accept projects that brought too much stress. The priority was to spend as much time as possible with her family — and still make enough money to have a comfortable lifestyle.

Hart's philosophy is "work to live, not live to work." And that's a concept companies are adding to the corporate cul-

ture.

Exchanging a draining lifestyle for a more fulfilling, balanced routine can translate into increased productivity, according to management consultants.

"There are times when something just has to give," said Thomas Shea, managing principal for Right Management Consultant's Florida and Caribbean region. "Sometimes people simply have to choose between two diametrically opposed courses — between career and family, for example, or between an exciting new opportunity and the security of a familiar position. Recognizing this can be a liberating experience for employers and employees. And their companies are better off once they learned to set more realistic expectations for themselves."

Get a life

Bill Bench, president of Benchmark HR Solutions of Alexandria, Va., said a burnt-out, over-stressed employee is about as "useful to an employer as a

mained horse is to a jockey. A loss of perspective, cynicism, frustration, anxiety and depression are just some of the chronic conditions that burned out employees wrestle with while their employers contend with lost productivity and decreased morale."

If employers want to get the most out of their employees, they must realize that it's a marathon, not a sprint, Bench said. "So, to keep employees happy, productive and morale up, employers need to keep them fresh and invigorated for the long haul."

His suggestions include:

- Sending employees and their families gift baskets on special occasions and include family tickets to a sporting event or play. This sends the message that the company thinks outside of its own self-interest.

- Sponsoring gym discounts or memberships for a family. Staying healthy reduces medical insurance claims in the long run and allows employees to rejuvenate themselves.

• Arranging flexible work schedules.

Allow employees to manage their own time. Give them opportunities to meet family and social responsibilities — and get their work done in a more efficient manner.

"Allowing employees to leave the office for a few hours to catch their child's soccer game or school play isn't only a nice gesture, it's a good mental release," Bench said.

- Hiring a concierge or personal shopper. Some outside helpers run errands such as picking up dry cleaning, buying concert tickets and making dinner reservations.

Part of the act

Employees must contribute to the process.

The first step, Right Management's Shea said, is to identify goals purposes and values. He suggests employee create

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Working from home can balance hectic lifestyle.

"Managers can use an employee's desire for work and life balance as a starting point for streamlining the work process," Shea said. "Be open to suggestions from other team members with whom you work, and be willing to make positive suggestions of your own."

Finding a healthy balance in the working-to-live philosophy of business sometimes ends in a situation like

Hart's, where the employee is happier with another career path.

"Maintaining a good work-life balance is not a revolutionary concept, nor is it brain surgery," Bench said. "It is, however, a commitment that should be taken seriously by both employers and employees alike. Both parties should be as diligent about securing and following through with off-work activities as they are with at-work activities."

Working well

1. Talk with supervisors about work

loads, challenges and professional goals. With this information, managers can better delegate complementary projects in line with employee goals.

2. Know when to say when. Employees must be practical about what they can and cannot do. No one likes someone who over-promises and under-delivers.

3. Network. Business events are a good opportunity to grow as a professional and to enjoy the company of like-minded people.