

## Do As I Say, Not As I Do

Study finds alarming work/life harmony practices among HR practitioners



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SAVVY ORGANIZATIONS RECOGNIZE employee health and wellness as catalysts for enhanced employee performance, productivity and retention, in addition to decreased medical claims, absenteeism and workplace injuries. As human resources practitioners, we play an integral role in championing the business case for work/life balance and fostering cultures that live the values. We avidly experiment with ingredients to perfect the recipe for wellness, the gateway to healthy lifestyles for our employees; but do we practise what we preach as a profession?

### HOW HEALTHY ARE WE?

I conducted a research study between January and April 2007, examining the wellness practices of HR practitioners with data collected from 376 online surveys and 43 interviews. HR professionals' response average, when asked to describe their overall personal wellness on a Likert scale, was 5.4 (10 being outstanding)—with five per cent having fully integrated work/life balance. Of those five per cent, 62 per cent were motivated to make lifestyle shifts following a health crisis. HR practitioners also reported that their health management is submerged by duelling personal and professional obligations, with 39 per cent experiencing symptoms of burnout.

The research found that prevailing stressors include work overload compounded by daily interruptions; strenuous work hours and a frenetic work pace; struggles to retain knowledge currency; role conflict attributed to incompatible demands from multiple sources; and eroding interpersonal work relationships.

### BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS OF CURRENT WELLNESS PRACTICES

Chronic hours, fatiguing workloads and shrinking deadlines characterize the emergent HR culture, which works at cross-purposes to corporate values, philosophies and practices that advocate wellness. Given the altruistic nature of HR's role, personal health management takes a back seat to the dizzying pace in which it fulfils its professional mandate.

If health management is the essence of strategic advantage in organizations, there are parallel strategic implications for human resources. Success and longevity as strategic business partners hinges on HR's health management practices. Contributing a full complement of skills, talents and knowledge to the strategic mandate comes from a place of "peak performance" rooted in personal wellness. Only when grounded in wellness does HR have the stamina to fully operationalize its evolving roles as internal consultant and facilitator of change.

### RESTORING WORK/LIFE HARMONY

Reclaiming work/life harmony reaches beyond provisions for secondary health management interventions—EAPs, fitness regimes and stress management events—which target stress after it has taken root. Focus should be on detecting root cause culprits of work/life discord lurking in our work environments, specifically on probing into our HR departments and combing every facet of functionality to identify and eradicate—or at least control—forces sustaining work/life dissonance.

Primary interventions may alleviate operational burdens, liberating HR practitioners to reposition themselves in the strategic arena. Specifically, it may relinquish time for the evaluative phase of project management; testing the merits of HR initiatives, and ultimately, putting measurement and evaluation on the radar as compulsory to the work that's done. HR's compass must be fixed on delivering ROI data to justify program costs and benefits.

### Key Findings

- 39% feel burnt out
- 5% fully commit to work/life balance
- 67% of management works in excess of 60 hours a week
- 39% said they accomplish only 50% of daily objectives.
- 19% have no support system
- 48% non-management and 70% management did not take all of their 2006 vacation days
- 71% experience stress resulting from technology
- 55% spent at least half of their day in e-communication

The research findings expose the tentative nature of wellness management practices in HR and petition us to set in motion the process by which we restore wellness. There needs to be a dialogue between colleagues to de-stigmatize attitudes and behaviours toward wellness, and HR must advocate success and professional survival as contingent upon health management. A culture of wellness is the hallmark of personal and professional excellence.

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