

A REAL BALANCING ACT

With the economy squeezing employers, demand for highly skilled talent is growing. As stress levels rise, so too does the need for life and work to comfortably coexist



Isn't it curious that as unemployment continues to hover near 10 percent, the decades-long movement to balance employees' work and personal lives has evolved into flexible new workplace models? These models are created by compounding factors, including pressure on companies to do more with less; a shift in demographics, attributed in part to fast-growing emerging markets; advancements in technology that enable borderless and 24/7 workplaces; and booming marketplace sophistication that demands

relentless innovation, greater value and efficiency. The result is that talentism has become the new capitalism.

"U.S. employers are taking work/life initiatives more seriously as talent has become more valuable and difficult to find," reports ManpowerGroup Chairman and CEO Jeffrey A. Joerres. As the world leader in innovative workforce solutions for more than 60 years, ManpowerGroup customizes solutions for employers to win talent where and when they need it.

Individual workers are exercising a greater voice in what ManpowerGroup refers to as the Human Age, and this power has evolved over time. By the mid-20th century, reasonable 40-hour work weeks were the norm. But that number began to creep up in the 1990s as baby boomers, who set the pace for the next generation, were compelled to work longer and harder. The resulting burnout affected the attitudes and health of workers across all business

sectors, and cost the companies that employed them billions of dollars each year in productivity losses.

Companies that offer a reasonable balance between work and the rest of life gain an edge when recruiting. ManpowerGroup works with job candidates to offer options that suit their career tracks and lifestyles, attracting people who seek specific time management arrangements. "With some highly skilled individuals, we become their only source for a job that aligns with their schedule. For example, they might seek to work six to nine months per year and then take a hiatus," says Joerres. "While not working, they have confidence that we are looking out for them, searching for a next position that aligns with their time frame."

Increasingly, highly skilled workers who are in demand can secure mini-sabbaticals throughout their careers. "In some cases," says Joerres, "we may be their only bridge to employment."

Companies that have created balanced workplace cultures report lower absenteeism, improved productivity, higher job satisfaction and higher employee retention rates. "For the most part, there are few negatives," says Joerres. "However, for companies to manage a workforce that has more freedom can be challenging. Their managers are pressured to clearly communicate appropriate expectations and manage results for the organization differently. If this is not done, it can lead to a stressful environment in which certain management styles will be perceived as unfair. A results-oriented model allows you to work from anywhere at any time as long as you produce desired outcomes. Team-oriented roles are harder to accommodate, unless team members are able to work independently on parts to a larger project."

New work/life models are gaining ground, even as talent pools are getting smaller and becoming less accessible. Despite these challenges, ManpowerGroup continues to unleash the potential of workers and connect them with the right opportunities. "Most large U.S. companies realize that individuals need varying work models based on their life circumstances, and we can help both halves of these relationships," says Joerres. ●

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