

A QUESTION of LEADERSHIP

JOAN GLUBCZYNSKI

Glubczynski is health promotion and work-life manager for SC Johnson.

Promoting work-life balance is challenging in today's increasingly competitive business environment. The demands of work often make it difficult for managers and those who report to them to separate their professional lives from their personal lives. Many people feel compelled to work harder and to work longer hours. There's also a growing sense among employees—and not just those at the managerial level—that they need to stay constantly accessible via cell phones, pagers, and e-mail even when the workday is over or they're on vacation. Not surprisingly, all this can lead to stress. But there are steps that managers can take to enhance work-life balance for themselves and others.

Some companies, including SC Johnson, offer options and programs designed to help employees balance their personal and work lives, such as part-time or flexible hours, telecommuting, and days on which employees are given the time to plan and reflect without the disruption of attending meetings. It's important for managers to be knowledgeable about and to support the use of such options and programs so they can keep employees informed about what is available to them. Managers can also act as models for employees by availing themselves of work-life balance initiatives. In addition, holding regular discussions with direct reports

about their work-life balance needs can help managers retain key people.

Innovation and flexibility in scheduling is a key way to improve work-life balance. Consider establishing core business hours for the organization and letting employees personalize their schedules on either side of those hours—starting and leaving work either earlier or later in the day. This approach has the added potential benefit of increasing productivity and efficiency, because managers and their subordinates can consider individual work styles in setting schedules—“morning people,” for instance, can opt to start work earlier in the day, when they are most energized and creative. Flexible scheduling also helps employees meet their family and other nonwork responsibilities and attend important events outside of work. It's important, however, for managers to set parameters for themselves and those who work for them—hours during which it is critical that they be available to clients and co-workers.

A healthy lifestyle is an important factor in work-life balance, and organizations and managers can promote health by encouraging exercise and full use of vacation time. Some companies have made exercise convenient for employees by establishing on-site fitness centers and letting employees set aside time each day to work out, or by subsidizing memberships in off-site gyms. But managers can also promote health through simpler actions, such as organizing lunchtime walks. Equally important

is encouraging employees to use all their vacation time and to space it in such a way that they avoid burnout and recharge their batteries. A recent survey by the Families and Work Institute found that 55 percent of employees who did not take all their vacation time reported high levels of feeling overworked, compared with 27 percent of employees who did use their full vacation benefit.

Managers should recognize that for both themselves and their subordinates, work affects personal life and vice versa. According to findings from the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce, conducted by the Families and Work Institute, the support and recognition that employees receive in the workplace are two of the most powerful predictors of productivity, job satisfaction, and employee commitment and retention. To encourage work-life balance, such support and recognition should extend not only to challenges and accomplishments on the job but also to those outside of work.

Forward-thinking managers understand the intersecting benefits of work-life balance, and they walk the talk by doing what they can to help achieve such a balance for themselves and their direct reports. Just as a successful, fulfilling career brings a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence that enhances one's personal life, a personal life that has a centering influence and provides an opportunity to rejuvenate has a positive effect on one's professional life and ultimately on business results.