

Losing Your Work/ Life Balance?

How to Ask Even the Most Rigid Employer for a Flexible Arrangement

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It's 7:45 and you're stuck in traffic - again. It's like a bad version of Groundhog Day. You got up at 5, rushed yourself and your family out the door and here you are, foiled again! As you seethe through yet another teeth-grinding, stress-causing delay, you think, "This is not a good use of my time. There has got to be a better way."

And there is, for many people. Depending on the demands of your job and your personal circumstances, flextime, telecommuting or another option could be just what you need to help balance your work life and home life.

OK, that was the easy part. Now comes the challenging part; explaining to your boss how a flexible schedule makes sense from a business standpoint. Luckily, that task is easier than ever. Smart employers understand that retaining good employees makes good economic sense. They also know that happy workers are more productive and help boost morale and performance across the organization.

Larger social and economic trends are also in your favor. Today's worker is likely to have family obligations, such as children or aging parents. Commutes have become longer and more congested. And technology has fundamentally changed the way we live and work.

Put it all together and the future of work is clear: It's in your home or done during non-traditional work hours, fueled by a high-speed Internet connection and a newly flexible attitude about work.

So, where do you start in your personal quest to maximize your time, restore balance to your life and simultaneously become a more valuable employee and a more attentive parent or caregiver?

Start by analyzing your job, breaking out tasks that require face-to-face collaboration and those that can be done remotely, through e-mail or by phone. Once you have that analysis, determine how many days a week you must be in the office and what hours are most critical. Research your company's policies on flexible schedules and investigate how other employees have negotiated similar accommodations.

Next, establish which of the available options works best for you and your employer. Full-time options include flextime, telecommuting or a compressed workweek. Part-time options include job sharing or reduced hours.

Now create a written plan for your boss that details how your job can be done as well – if not better – utilizing one of these options. The plan should emphasize how you will accomplish all your essential tasks and should anticipate concerns, such as attending meetings and working with clients and customers. Arrange a time to discuss the plan with your boss and be sure that the meeting emphasizes practical solutions rather than personal issues.

Once you get the go-ahead, understand that you are only partway to your goal of work-life balance. Now, you must do a thorough overhaul of your physical, intellectual and emotional environment. To make your new arrangement work, you must be organized and efficient. Take whatever steps are necessary to ensure this, from a well-appointed home office that is off-limits to family members to a time-management coach.

Now, good luck and get to work. You have joined the future of the workplace and it's up to you to be successful – in all areas of your life.