

STEREOTYPES BLOCK WORK-LIFE BALANCE PROGRESS

ACCORDING TO RESULTS OF FIRST ANNUAL WORK+LIFE FIT REALITY CHECK

New Year's Resolutions are Bound to Fail as Research Finds Rigid Thinking about Workplace Flexibility

December 7, 2006 – Those New Year's resolutions about work-life balance are bound to fail, according to new research, as stereotypes continue to block the progress of employees trying to achieve more work-life balance. The first Annual *Work+Life Fit Reality Check*, conducted by Opinion Research Corporation for Work+Life Fit, Inc., found while corporate workplace flexibility efforts and media coverage continue to focus on women and moms, more than 90 percent of a national probability sample of 981 full-time employed adults surveyed by telephone believe work-life balance is "An issue for everyone." Yet, only 15 percent say they actually have work-life balance. Holding back the other 85 percent are stereotypes about money, work ethic and supervisors.

The survey was conducted September 7 – 11 and has a margin of error of +/- 3 percent.

"We need to stop the focus on the 'who' wants a life outside of work and the 'why,' and instead focus on the 'how,'" says Cali Williams Yost, president of Work+Life Fit, Inc. and critically acclaimed author and blogger. "Men and women, single or married, couples with children and couples without are pretty much equal in their views that work-life fit is gender neutral, marriage neutral, age neutral and reason neutral."

In fact, of the 572 men surveyed, 95 percent said work-life balance is an issue for everyone while only 1 percent said it was "a mom's issue" and 4 percent said it was "a married person's issue." But men are more concerned about what others might think of them should they make work-life balance changes.

Says Brad Harrington, Ph.D., the Executive Director of the Boston College Center for Work and Family (CWF), "The men are stepping up and recognizing, 'This isn't just my wife's problem or my friend's, it's mine too.' That's progress, yet corporate and media biases continue to reinforce the status quo."

Even parents agree the issue is mom-dad neutral. Of the 435 respondents with children, 92 percent said work-life balance was an issue for everyone while 3 percent said it was a mom's issue. And while recent research shows work-life balance is a priority for both young men and women preparing to enter the workforce, 90 percent or more of employees in all age groups surveyed in the Work+Life Fit Reality Check responded this is an issue for everyone. For example, 94 percent in the 35 to 44 age group and 93 percent in the 55 to 64 age group deemed it an everyone issue.

Optimism but No Action as Outdated Stereotypes Block the Way

The Annual Work+Life Fit Reality Check is designed to monitor progress from the individual’s point of view. When asked “Do you think it’s possible for you to have work-life balance,” a surprising 85 percent of those surveyed said yes. And, in a challenge to the common thinking that parents and couples have more trouble balancing work and life, households with two or more members are significantly more likely to say it’s possible to have work-life balance. Only 78 percent of the one-member households surveyed said it was possible compared to 87 percent of the two-member households and 86 percent of the three-member households.

But despite that optimism, more than half of those asked said they have not discussed work-life balance with their supervisor, even though two-thirds of the respondents said they know it’s not just the company’s responsibility to create a flexibility-friendly work environment.

Employees are stuck. Progress is paralyzed by silence and outdated stereotypes as evidenced in the multiple reasons employees cited as why they have not been able to improve their work-life fit.

Might make less money:	45%
Boss would say no:	32%
Even with company programs, it really isn’t okay:	32%
Others will think I don’t work as hard:	29%
Might lose my job:	28%

Men and young workers are especially worried about what others will think. Men are significantly more likely than women, 32 percent versus 23 percent, to say “Others will think you don’t work as hard,” when asked what’s kept them from improving their work-life balance. Employees ages 25 to 34 were also significantly more likely than other age groups to worry about their colleagues’ opinions, and that they might lose their jobs.

“The good news is employees don’t think it’s a lost cause. But as long as they are afraid to ask, work-life programs are nothing more than web site promotion and employee hand book topics,” Yost says.

“Workplace flexibility programs and policies are window dressing. We spend too much time on them and not enough time on influencing manager and employee behavior,” CWF’s Harrington says. “We create a minimum standard, but not a culture.”

Until that culture exists, companies are missing documented and proven opportunities to improve their talent management, employee retention and engagement, and financial performance. Employees and companies need to work together to make work-life fit a business issue that's part of the day to day agenda just as they do with project updates, budgets or sales reviews.

“Both employee and corporate ideas about work-life fit need to do a fast-forward to catch up with today's 24/7 global workplace realities,” Yost says. “We have enough flexibility polices and mommy war news stories. Let's stop writing and start talking or we'll just have another year of failed New Year's resolutions.”

Cali Williams Yost is a Families and Work Institute alum and author of the critically acclaimed *Work+Life: Finding the Fit That's Right for You* (Riverhead/Penguin Group, 2005). Her *Work+Life Fit Blog*, www.worklifefit.com, is believed to be the only blog focusing exclusively on workplace balance and flexibility.

Editors/Reporters: Available upon request – Interviews with individuals in various demographics referenced, personal Reality Check quiz individuals can complete and graphics. Also available – tips on how to avoid letting technology be the Grinch that steals Christmas.

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