

WORK LIFE BALANCE IN THE WORKPLACE GETTING STARTED



Government of South Australia
SafeWork SA

Work Life Balance

INFORMATION SHEET

March 2011

#2

Finding the right balance between work and life is a priority for many South Australians. Work life balance is about individual choices and having the ability to manage the interaction between work and the other demands of life. Workforce planning is key to achieving work life balance at your business.

WHY CONSIDER WORK LIFE BALANCE?

You may be considering work life balance as an issue at your workplace because:

- key staff are getting older and considering retirement
- you want to become a best practice organisation and an employer of choice
- work and family policies are good for business
- employees need a more flexible workplace
- you want to attract the best possible staff
- there is a problem with staff turnover or absenteeism
- you are looking at long term workforce planning
- you are introducing or reviewing a workplace agreement
- you are applying for a grant from the Fresh Ideas for Work and Family¹ program.

The retention of key skills is a priority for many businesses. In today's competition for skilled labour, the cost of attracting and retaining staff is motivating employers to look at arrangements which support their employees' ability to balance work and life commitments. As an employer:

- do you want to follow or fight industry trends?

- will you see continued growth and have to compete for talent?
- are you diversifying during industry downturn, wanting to attract new skills sets?
- will the need for staff be a steady or seasonal increase?
- during a skills shortage, will there be a need for apprentices or trainees?
- does the existing workforce need skills development?

IDENTIFYING YOUR WORKFORCE NEEDS

Work life balance is not a 'one size fits all' arrangement. Employees of any age or gender may need different flexibilities and understanding when developing a work life balance strategy. For example:

- who is caring for **children**?
- who is caring for **ageing parents or family members** with disabilities?
- who is **balancing** caring for children and ageing parents or family members with disabilities?
- who is thinking of **retiring**?
- who is working excessive overtime and might just **need a break**?
- what is the rate of **absenteeism**?
- have recent **exit interviews** shown a need for flexible work arrangements?²

Managing the competing demands of work, family and social life is an issue that affects many South Australians. By promoting a work life balance culture and environment in the workplace, employers can improve their ability to attract and retain employees, in turn enriching our health and wellbeing and building stronger communities.

The South Australian Government is committed to work life balance through South Australia's Strategic Plan Target 2.12 'Improve the quality of life for all South Australians through the maintenance of a healthy work-life balance.'

SafeWork SA is the lead agency for the target through the Work Life Balance Strategy.

www.safework.sa.gov.au/worklifebalance

'A female engineer contacted us while she was pregnant. She was working full-time and asked her employer if she could go part-time, but was flatly refused: 'it's full-time or nothing'.

Flexibility is part of our workplace, so we were happy to take her on knowing she was pregnant and needed to go part-time – she was engaged because of her skills.

She still works for us part-time; we've got all her knowledge and skills; she's a loyal employee; and she'll never forget that we offered her an opportunity she couldn't get elsewhere.'

Karen, HR Manager



¹Fresh Ideas for Work and Family <http://deewr.gov.au/WorkplaceRelations/freshIdeas/Pages/default.aspx>

²See Information Sheet #3 in this series for more information on flexible work arrangements.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF

By effectively communicating work life balance policies and benefits with staff, you can improve the satisfaction and commitment of current employees and strengthen your competitive advantage in attracting new recruits.

You can facilitate discussion about work life balance by:

- **telling** staff that work life balance measures are on the agenda
- **asking** which employees need to manage work and caring or other responsibilities
- **using** emails, newsletters, flyers, posters and intranet to encourage discussion
- **making** clear statements about what's changing, why, when and how.

DECIDING ON A POLICY

Find out what people want. Involve everyone (directors, managers and employees) in talking collectively and individually about organisational and employee needs.

Form a work life balance project team or interest group where all ideas are accepted for consideration. For example:

- nominate key individuals to champion work life balance and move ideas forward
- encourage staff to discuss ideas with management and present them at meetings
- invite guest speakers to add to the discussion

- keep everyone informed
- look at the operational needs of the business
- look at business and employee priorities, and agree on what is achievable
- consider the impact of flexible arrangements on clients, customers and stakeholders, and set up arrangements to cover absences
- identify managers' training needs
- agree on work life balance performance measures
- develop a process for applying for flexible arrangements
- draft a policy that is clear and accessible, and invite feedback and discussion
- create a section on work life balance in the human resource policy and/or workplace agreement
- evaluate, refine and improve your work life balance strategies.

FORMALISING A POLICY

Formalising arrangements for work life balance promotes fairness, transparency and consistency. This also ensures that good intentions actually translate to actions.

For example, you can:

- remind people what work life balance is and why a policy has been developed
- reaffirm the business commitment to work balance
- inform everyone on where a copy of the policy can be found
- invite everyone to make use of the policy and provide comment.

CHECKLIST

- Decide why work life balance will benefit you and your business
- Look at the needs of your workforce
- Look at your business and your industry
- Communicate with your people
- Meet the workforce
- Listen to all input
- Decide and formulate policy
- Implement
- Review and improve

DISCLAIMER

This publication contains information regarding occupational health and safety. It includes some of your obligations under the occupational health and safety legislation that SafeWork SA administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate Acts and Regulations. This publication may refer to legislation that has been amended or repealed. When reading this publication always refer to the latest laws.

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www.safework.sa.gov.au

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Email: help@safework.sa.gov.au
(the Help Centre closes at 4.15pm on Wednesdays)

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