WORK-LIFE HARMONY TOOLKIT

A MWH Toolkit Designed to share strategies for synthesizing your personal and professional lives in a healthy way
Welcome to our Work-Life Harmony Toolkit! Dr. Joti Samra, CEO & Founder of MyWorkplaceHealth has put together a number of our favorite resources to help you develop skills and strategies to enhance your work-life harmony that you can start to use right now. In this toolkit, you will find resources on:

- Work-Life Harmony
- Burnout
- Enhancing WLH
- Values
- Needs
- Behavioral Change
- MyWorkplaceHealth
WORK-LIFE HARMONY

Current Realities

COVID-19 was a massive upheaval that impacted business for almost every sector, and virtually every occupation. It has blurred the lines between work and social life. Suddenly, we are dealing with a pandemic that has only amplified stressors we've already had and created new challenges.

The modern work environment is rapidly changing and evolving. For many of us, work-life harmony feels difficult to achieve, even in the best of times.

For some of us, our office is the same place we sleep, eat, and live. This can make it increasingly difficult to separate work-mode and home-mode. We can't leave our work at the office; it comes with us.

Because of many factors, we're now working longer and longer days, which leads to less and less time spent on life. This shifting of the scales can decrease our overall well-being and increase tension and pull in our personal lives.

Work and personal lives are colliding in ways they never have before, elevating our level of stress.

In customer-facing and healthcare roles, there was a massive redefinition of who a 'front line' worker is. Small businesses saw a 40% reduction in revenue, and an equal number had to reduce hours, lay off workers, pivot their business, or close entirely.

Balance vs Harmony

We throw around the idea of work-life balance all the time: typically, we think of a scale, and imagine putting more weight on the 'personal' side of the scale. But the reality of modern-day work lives and structure, combined with life demands such as the increasing costs of living, makes balance often impossible.

Instead, we should be thinking about creating harmony between our work and personal lives - where the two are integrated. Imagine an orchestra: there are multiple pieces, players and instruments, but they all work together.

The goal of work-life harmony is to see our work and personal lives going hand-in-hand with fluidity and flow.
Three Dimensions of Burnout

One of the strongest signs of a work-life harmony mismatch is burnout. The World Health Organization defines burnout as "a syndrome resulting from chronic stress that has not been successfully managed.

Essentially, burnout is physical and emotional exhaustion that workers can experience when they feel excessive stress, have low job satisfaction and feel powerless and overwhelmed at work.

We often think of burnout in a work context, but it can also stem from personal factors; it's not always the employers' fault. Workplaces have a responsibility to look after the wellness of their employees, but we can also take steps as individuals to prevent burnout.

No matter where it's coming from, burnout is a big deal - especially right now. Burnout can be characterized by three dimensions:

1. Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
2. Reduced professional effectiveness;
3. Feelings of negativity or cynicism towards one's job.

Even before COVID, a 2018 Gallup study of nearly 7,500 full time employees found that 23% reported feeling burned out at work 'very often or always' - and 44% said they felt it 'sometimes.' A 2019 study of 2,000 workers by Randstad US found that almost 40% thought of leaving their jobs because of burnout. That's a lot of burnout!
BURNOUT

What does burnout look like?

Physical symptoms of burnout
- Chronic low energy or exhaustion
- Aches and pains
- Frequent colds, flus, infections
- Sleep problems

Mental symptoms of burnout
- Boredom
- Forgetfulness
- Poor concentration
- Fault finding

Behavioural symptoms of burnout
- Withdrawing from responsibilities
- Isolating from others
- Excess food, drugs, or alcohol
- Taking frustrations out on others

We need to pay extra attention to our mental health, now more than ever. The increased stress and anxieties of this time can lead to an increased chance of someone experiencing burnout.

It's even more important during these times to make sure that proper work-life harmony is achieved. Hopefully, we enjoy our jobs, but if we recognize that we're starting to dislike our job, that can be a sign that we're experiencing burnout.

Noticing warning signs early on can help you take proactive steps to reduce stresses in your life and find healthier, more adaptive ways to respond.
How to Enhance Work-Life Harmony
Work-Life Harmony can be a considerable challenge! We can always take decisions to increase our harmony, even if we feel that we are ‘stuck’ with certain responsibilities.

The key is focusing on things within our domain of control. Overall harmony is often (but not always) less about work than it is about overall happiness in life.

Think about what you're aiming for when you think about enhancing your work-life harmony. Greater workplace productivity? More uninterrupted personal time? Both?

Values Alignment
Make choices based on what’s important to you from a values-based perspective (the paycheck that comes with work counts!). Values are defined as the regard that something is held to deserve; or the importance, worth, or usefulness of something.

When we're feeling discouraged in life, it’s often because we're living in a way that’s inconsistent with our values. When what you do and how you behave match your values, life is usually good – you feel satisfied and content. But when these don’t align with your values, that’s when things feel...wrong. This can be a real source of unhappiness.

Values help guide how we live our lives. They help us define what we want to pursue in day-to-day life AND what we want our lives to be about more generally.

Living in accordance with all of our core values can be difficult. We have constraints on our time and energy and social expectations for what we should and shouldn’t do. And although values are usually fairly stable, they don't have strict limits or boundaries. They may change as you move through life. For example, when you start your career, your top priority may be money and status. However, once you have a family, your priorities may shift to keeping a healthy work-life balance.

If you don't value competition and work in a highly competitive sales environment, are you likely to be satisfied with your job?
Be Realistic

One crucial part of work-life harmony is being realistic with what you can achieve, in both your work and personal lives.

If your to-do lists are too long, you will always feel frustrated about not achieving everything you want to. This can lead to you spending your personal time worrying about work or vice versa.

Work with a shorter to-do list, and prioritize one thing at a time so that it feels more doable and less overwhelming. You can even come up with a "Not to do" list of things you should avoid (e.g. distractions) and things that can be shelved for later!

Don't feel that your to-do lists must be final. If some tasks are taking longer than expected, check to see if any of your to-do items can be moved to a 'different list' - either doing them on a different day, or letting somebody else take on some of the work.

Find Flow Activities

Have you ever been so into doing something that you kind of shut everything out and lose track of time?

Flow, or being in a flow state, is when we're so immersed in some experience that we kind of lose our sense of time and other distractions become irrelevant.

It's a mental state that occurs when doing an activity and is characterized by INTENSE FOCUS, ENJOYMENT, and COMPLETE ABSORPTION with the task. How do you know when you're in flow?

There are three core components:

1. absorption (being completely immersed in the activity);
2. enjoyment (experiencing joy from the activity); and
3. intrinsic motivation (doing the activity because you want to, not because of an external reward).

Getting into a state where you're naturally and intrinsically mindful, challenged, and able to reach goals and achieve mastery is good for your mental health.

Flow cannot be a passive activity (e.g., watching TV) - it has to be something that *you* are doing. Find something good you can do to put yourself in this state, and make a point to schedule time for it.
Work with Passion

Passion is when we're excited, enthused, and immersed in something. It helps us find meaning in our work, and makes the work less depleting.

Sometimes it's tough to be enthusiastic and happy about our work or other regular tasks; it's hard to be excited about mopping the floor.

However, the self-talk we have in our minds has a massive impact on how we feel. When we are stressed or overwhelmed, we get into a negative self-talk and see things as negative. We just see the things we didn't get done - dishes in the sink, or kids needing help with math homework.

If we approach things with that negative thinking, our emotions catch up fast. So when you think about work and responsibilities, and even chores, give yourself more positive self-talk. Remind yourself of how great it will be once the job is done, or how good it will make you feel. Connect it to something you care about.

When we can connect with the things we love most about our work, and remember what drew us to it, that's good for our mental health. We feel more balanced as work and personal weave together in a positive way.

Prioritize Relationships

Our personal and work relationships are critical in buffering and protecting against inevitable stressors. We are fundamentally social creatures. We not only survive, but thrive in the face of adversity when we have strong social connections. Positive social relationships in our lives and having a strong sense of individual and collective meaning and purpose are two essential keys to resilience.

People who feel more connected to others have lower levels of anxiety and depression. Moreover, studies show they also have higher self-esteem, greater empathy for others, and are more trusting and cooperative. Consequently, others are more open to trusting and cooperating with them.

In contrast, loneliness can be toxic. People who are more isolated than they want to be are less happy, their health declines earlier in midlife, their brain functioning declines sooner, and they live shorter lives.

It's not just how many friends you have, and it's not whether you're in a romantic relationship. It's the quality of your close relationships that matters. Living amid conflict is bad for our health (e.g., high-conflict marriages). Living in good, warm relationships is protective.

When we're busy, it's often our relationships which suffer. Make a list of people - friends, family, colleagues - who you'd like to connect with.
Set Boundaries and Create Structure

Get a structured and rigid routine or schedule. This tells your brain and body when it’s time to change between work-time and personal-time. The more rigid we can be with boundaries, the better it can be for our mental health.

First, develop a routine for your day that takes care of both your responsibilities and yourself.

Give your day a clearly defined structure, schedule or rhythm and try to stick to it. Set aside specific time for work, family, social, and personal time. This will help ensure one thing doesn’t take over your day or week. You’ll feel more balanced or “in harmony” and be able to see where you might need to allocate more time.

Pay special attention to your physical routines, as they can serve as a healthy basis for everything else.

Second, whatever you do, do it fully. Don’t half do things.

Half doing is when you’re working and eating and with your kid, and when you’re in bed watching Netflix and checking your email. In those times, we’re not immersed in that flow state. If you’re going to watch a show on Netflix, then set yourself up for some really good downtime.

Put away the phone, limit distractions, and don’t work on emails because what you’re doing is taking away from the enjoyment and effectiveness of that little pause and recharge.

When you’re at work, be at work. When you’re with family or friends, be with family or friends. When you’re relaxing on your own, relax on your own.

Developing a healthy routine:

- Eat lots of healthy, non-processed, plant-based food a few times a day
- Reduce alcohol consumption and have a few alcohol-free days per week
- Encourage movement and ensure you’re getting at least half an hour of physical activity a few times per week
- Get 7-8 hours of sleep per night by practicing good sleep hygiene
Values-Based Goal Setting

It's important to take a step back and think more broadly about what we value in life. Then, we can make sure our behaviours align with those values to achieve increased psychological health.

Consider for a moment... What do you value?

- Family
- Career
- Education
- Spirituality
- Citizenship
- Health
- Friendship
- Recreation

Exercise: For each of these values (and any others that you can think of), assign a score of 1-10 for how important that value is to you, and another score 1-10 for how much you feel you're living in accordance with it. If there are big discrepancies between the scores for any value, start thinking of ways to solve that.
Determine Needs and Emotions

All humans have basic needs. When those needs are met, we feel positive emotions. When they're unmet, we feel negative emotions.

The fulfillment of your basic human needs is critical to your overall life situation. It can strongly affect many areas of your life, including your work performance, how you interact with others, and your engagement with leisure activities.

Determine your needs, then find ways to fulfill those needs.

Exercise: For each of these needs (and any others you can think of), consider what meeting that need looks like for you. Then, score each need from 1-10 based on how much you feel it is being fulfilled in your life. Come up with some strategies on how to better fulfill the lowest-scoring needs.
TIPS FOR MAKING BEHAVIOUR CHANGES THAT STICK

1 Identify Your Goal

- Pick a specific behaviour to change. Start with no more than one to two behaviours to change at a time. Define in exact terms what you would like to change.
- Ensure that your goal is measurable. To change your goal, you will have to know where you are headed, and how to determine if you are getting/have gotten there.
- Pick an attainable goal. The goal should be something that, based upon the life you are living, is something that you can achieve.
- Ensure the goal is realistic. You may want to lose 30 pounds, but a realistic goal may be to lose 15 pounds this year and another 15 pounds the following year.
- Ensure the goal is time-limited. Set a specific period of time in which you will accomplish your goal. Behavioural change takes a series of steps, and those steps can each be accomplished over a specific period of time. As you accomplish your time-limited steps, you can reward yourself for successes.

2 Identify your Readiness to Change

- Before you begin, ask yourself questions such as “how ready am I?”... “is this the right time for me to make a change?”...“what are the pros and cons of changing?”.
- Consider the benefits of the change. How can you begin to make the change realistically? What would life be like if you didn’t make the change? Is the change worth it? How or why? How would the change impact your life in a positive manner?
- Consider how the change fits in with other important life values that you hold.
- Prepare to change. Gather the information and tools that you need. Anticipate setbacks. Remember that small change is better than no change. Get support as you start to make the change.
- As you start to change, consider how to build upon the behaviour over time. What other behaviours can you add-in?
- Once the behaviour change has been made, consider how to transition to a long-term maintenance plan. How can you sustain this behaviour change over time?
TIPS FOR MAKING BEHAVIOUR CHANGES THAT STICK

3 Identify Barriers

- Anticipate setbacks. If you have tried to make this change in the past, what got in the way of being successful? Problem-solve the barriers that you have encountered in the past.
- Identify the pros of not changing the behaviour (this can often help you appreciate why the change has not yet happened). Identify the cons of changing (the reasons the change may be difficult to do).
- Establish a specific contingency plan for each of the barriers you identify.

4 Implement Change

Identifying the following cognitive processes of change can help increase the likelihood of behavioural change:
- Barriers/traps: identify the common barriers you may encounter.
- Increase knowledge: obtain the background information you may need to make the change.
- Identify the consequences of changing and not changing—what are the potential impacts if you both did and did not make the change?
- Understand the benefits of the change—how would the change impact your life in an immediate/meaningful way?
- Identify options—what are the options you have for change? There are often several paths to the same end goal.

Identifying the following behavioural processes of change can help increase the likelihood of behavioural change:
- Substitute alternatives: be flexible and identify different ways you can achieve your overall goal.
- Enlist supports: find a friend or co-worker that may also want to make the change. It can often be easier to make a change when you partner with someone else.
- Reward yourself: make sure you reinforce and reward yourself for small successes!
- Set triggers & reminders: when life gets busy and other stressors enter our lives, it can be easy to let good self-care fall behind.
- Obtain a baseline of your behaviour by tracking your usual activity for a week. This can often help you identify patterns in your day and times when it would be easier to implement the change.
- Identity and actively work to change habits that you may have gotten into that are not conducive to achieving your goal.
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### Implement Change Cont.

(Cont’) Identifying the following behavioural processes of change can help increase the likelihood of behavioural change:

- Approach behavioural change gradually. Make small, specific changes.
- Make a schedule with yourself to build the activity into your day-to-day life.
- Follow the “double-time” rule: schedule double the time you think it would take to achieve the change.

### Revisit & Revise

- Do not get discouraged by setbacks. If you are not on track with the changes you identified, work to identify the barriers. Were your expectations too high? Was the specific goal you set too ambitious?
- Revise your goal as necessary.
- Expect and visualize success!

### Reward Yourself

- Set milestones that can help you track your progress.
- Ensure that you schedule regular rewards for each milestone that you achieve.
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MyWorkplaceHealth provides customized strategies and solutions to enhance workplace mental health, helping you and your organization adhere to industry best practices and the tenets of the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health & Safety (PH&S) in the Workplace. Investing in psychological health and safety strengthens an organization's economic stability and reputation as an employer of choice - but more importantly, we believe it's just the right thing to do. For more information, visit our website.

The CEO and Founder of MyWorkplaceHealth is Dr. Joti Samra, R.Psych. She is a national thought leader on issues relating to psychological health, wellness and resilience. She is also the Clinic Director of the Psychological Health & Safety Clinic - a clinical and coaching practice.

Dr. Samra is a highly-regarded expert in psychological health and safety (PH&S). Over the past two decades, she has been involved in numerous national initiatives that have contributed to policy change in Canada, and is a Founding & Ongoing Member of the CSA Technical Committee that developed the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace. This Standard is the first of its kind in the world, and has shaped policy development for workplace PH&S at the international Organization for Standardization (ISO) level.