

Achieving the right balance

Attitudes shift in a field where long hours, heavy workloads have always been the norm

BY LINDA OBELE | Contributing Writer

All work and no play may be boring, but until recently, long hours and heavy workloads have been an acceptable part of the fabric at most law firms.

Not so much anymore. Law firm owners and managers say they're joining the ranks of employers who are realizing two key facts about work-life balance: First, it's healthier for employees; and second, it can be a useful recruitment and retention tool in a tough economy.

Jordan Rose, owner of Rose Law Group in Scottsdale, said the attitude shift is a big one for an industry well-known for its all-nighters and its legendary image of young associates putting in grueling hours to make partner one day.

Rose said workloads are still extreme — at times easily topping 200 hours a month, depending on the time of year and the case. However, mobile technology and demands from a new generation of workers who want to play as hard as they work are helping advance work-life balance conversations and policies in firms across the country.

"I think there's definitely a different mind-set than there was in, say, the '80s, when it was all about who could bill 2,000 hours and sleep on the firm's sofa the most nights in a row," said Rose.

Today's law firms, instead, are being populated by young associates from the millennial generation, characterized by their tech savvy and their commitment to having a personal life outside the office.

"It's a completely different group to talk to now when we're recruiting," said

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Rose

James Slaughter was hired as a full-time concierge at Rose Law Group to help simplify life for the firm's attorneys and support staff.

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ROSE LAW GROUP



WORK-LIFE BALANCE

WFD Consulting and Worldat-Work's Alliance for Work-Life Progress' Global Study on Men and Work-Life Integration analyzed how organizations can remove the stereotypes and barriers preventing men from taking advantage of work-life offerings. It also sought to understand what prevents male leaders and managers from supporting the use of work-life options. Here are a few of the findings:

LEADERSHIP ATTITUDES: Business leaders around the world have bought into the business case for work-life effectiveness and have programs and policies in place. However, these programs are often ineffective because managers still cling to the notion that the "ideal worker" is an employee with few personal commitments. Half of managers in the emerging markets and four in 10 managers in developed markets believe that the most productive employees are those without a lot of personal commitments.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: Even executives who say they are committed to work-life integration often believe the risks of implementing such programs outweigh the benefits. When

companies do have programs in place, both men and women report penalties for using work-life benefits. Employees in emerging markets are almost three times more likely to experience a penalty for using flexible work arrangements and/or other work-life options than those in developed markets.

WORK AND PERSONAL IDENTITY: In terms of work identification and personal/family identity, there is little difference among generations or between men and women. Instead, the tangible difference can be found between emerging and developed countries, with work identification registering much higher in emerging markets than in developed ones.

MANAGING WORK AND FAMILY LIFE: Both men and

women are challenged to manage work and family life. In terms of solutions, flexible work arrangements dominate the list of most valued options for both men and women.

FINANCIAL STRESS: Financial stress is a top work-life issue across country and gender, and the top issue for most. Employees increasingly spend part of their on-the-job time addressing financial concerns. Employers can ease this stress by increasing employee assistance programs, offering financial counseling programs, and being as transparent as possible about the corporate financial situation and job security.

Source: WorldatWork

