

# Figuring out Work-Life Balance For Recruiting

Excerpts from Electronic Recruiting Exchange

*Everyone talks about work-life balance. It drips from the lips of recruiters and HR folks and jumps off the pages of recruiting web sites. Articles touting the "Best Companies to Work For" include it as one of their criteria.*

Yet, deep inside, we all know that almost no one ever achieves any balance. We either choose to mostly work or to mostly stay home, raise the kids, and dabble with a career.

The generational differences are huge in regards to work-life balance. Most baby boomers accepted the fact that they would struggle to raise a family and both work, and that one of them would work "less" than the other to compensate. It was rarely discussed because it was just the way it was.

Of course, unfairly, it was most often the woman who "lessened" her career. Recruiters talked about how challenging positions would be, not how much flexibility one might have. Time ruled and everyone was expected to put in at least an eight-hour day and a 40-hour week, and usually much more.

Gen X, those ranging in age roughly from 30 to 45, began to change this mindset in the 1980s by insisting



that family was as important as a job and both had to co-exist in some sort of balance. Thus, the term work-life balance was coined.

Since then, companies have struggled and agonized over ways to achieve this balance. Some have offered on-site child-care, some flexible

work time, some telecommuting, and some all of those.

Jobs were shared and managers where expected to show compassion and flexibility in dealing with family

issues. HR polices have been tweaked to offer more exceptions and more flexible approaches to family illness and parent care. Some states have legislated more time off for pregnant or sick workers. Yet, most of us don't feel very balanced.

Gen Y, or the Millennials as some call them, range in age from the late teens to the late twenties. They have chosen a slightly different view of things.



ALPERN ROSENTHAL  
INSPIRING OPPORTUNITIES

*please see back*

# Balance *from front*

Most of the Gen Ys have specific views about work balance:

1. They accept the fact that there is no such thing as work-life balance.
2. Therefore, they generally do not get involved with family commitments as early as boomers or Gen X did. They are not marrying as young. In 1950, men married on average at 23 and women at 20. In 2003, men averaged 27 and women 25. Nor are they having as many children. Fifty-seven percent of U.S. households in 1998 consisted of one or two people. This compares with 78.2% in 1950.
3. They are also choosing to create a sustainable lifestyle for the amount they wish to work. Those who want to travel and have personal time, choose to work part-time or in jobs with great flexibility. They do not have children and do not buy houses and expensive cars. Those who are more career-oriented are choosing organizations where work is intense but satisfying. They want opportunities and challenges more than they want a job and a career just so they can raise a family.

They are not thinking about balance at all. They tip the scales one way or the other and seem content for now. This puts recruiters, hiring managers, and organizations in a tight spot.

What can recruiters do to attract and keep these different generations?

- **Tailor messages and jobs and match them to the right person.** It's not easy or even smart to have the same messages for each generation.

Smart recruiters are tailoring their messages to the generations they are seeking and are offering part-time positions, shared positions, and others jobs that are clearly designed for someone willing to sacrifice a lot for the opportunity. Positions need to be classified and advertised according to the level of flexibility and expected commitment. As people are interviewed for positions, their willingness to accept the job commitments are critical in making hiring decisions. What is missing today is a realistic assessment of what commitment the job requires and what flexibility is acceptable.

- **Change the reward structure.**

Every organization also needs to realize that some of the things they need to get done will take people willing to go the extra mile, and those people will expect to be rewarded for that level of commitment. Rewards will have to be adjusted to better fit the time/commitment/flexibility equation for that position. For example, someone who is expected to spend half their time traveling and working in a global environment with phone calls at all hours and virtual meetings at odd times should be rewarded differently than someone who can count on a regular set of hours and a constant workplace.

- **Open the lines of communication**

**and discussion.** Recruiters should sponsor executive briefings, conduct interviews, and spend time getting the word out to everyone in the organization that times are different and that the way organizations structure work must change.

Not everyone in a generation is the same and there are, of course, great variations in needs and expectations.

However, it is safe to say that when organizations set out clear expectations about the work and recruit accordingly, they have less turnover and less discontent than when they assume every generation thinks the same.

*For more information, contact Cheryl A. Jones, Manager of Corporate Placement Services for Alpern Rosenthal. She can be reached at 412.281.7692, ext. 319 or at [caj@alpern.com](mailto:caj@alpern.com)*