

## Work life balance: What is it and how do you get it?



Work life balance has been a buzz word in the workplace for the last 5 years or so. What does it actually mean?

I personally believe that work life balance is different for everyone. For a parent with young children, it may mean having the flexibility to be around after school to pick the kids up or attend

sports days and other events. For a high flying executive who works long hours, it may be having the flexibility to go to the gym at lunch time.

Although there has been a lot of talk about work life balance over recent years and despite a decade of social change, with an increase in flexible work practices such as part-time work and job-sharing, it seems we're back to working long hours as a "badge of honour".

Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show we spend an average of 50 hours a week at work, not counting out-of-office hours spent glued to our BlackBerry, texting, responding to emails and making work calls.

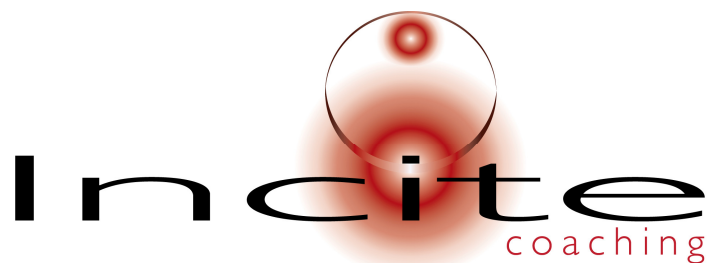
Barbara Holmes, from consultancy Managing Work/Life Balance International, says "We should be focused on performance and not on valuing long hours."

Managing Work/Life Balance International's national benchmarking survey (2007) found many workplaces have embraced the idea that working long hours is good, which has resulted in the time spent at work increasing by 25 per cent, coupled with decreases in productivity and increases stress-related absenteeism.

So how can you improve your work life balance and increase your productivity at the same time?

**1) Define what work life balance means to you.** What is important to you and what do you want to achieve in both your personal and professional life?

**2) Learn to say "no."** Many of us avoid saying "no" at work, for fear of refusing a request in a more competitive economy or fear of being overlooked for the next promotion or progression. It isn't what you say it's how you say it. If you just don't have the time to complete the request, or it is unfair, be polite and make a useful suggestion about how the work may be managed e.g. "how about John, he was working on that project last week?"



**3) Set boundaries.** Set clear boundaries between work and home. Turn off your work mobile, blackberry or laptop when you're home. Answering just one call at 10pm, will set the expectation that you will do it on a regular basis. If you must check your emails after hours, don't reply, wait until the following morning.

**4) Get organised.** Use your diary to book in the day's or week's tasks and stick to it. This will not only ensure that you complete your tasks and are able to leave on time, it will also prevent people using your diary (or online diary facility) to book needless or irrelevant meetings.

**5) Leave on time.** By organising yourself and committing to completing the important tasks, you will be able to leave on time. There is a limit to how long you can keep up long hours. Exhaustion, stress, insomnia and poor eating habits will catch up with you eventually, creating disillusionment, decreased productivity and a loss of physical and mental wellbeing.

**6) Delegate.** Use the skills of those around you to help you with your workload. Not only will you reduce your workload, if done in the right way, it can even increase your colleagues'/staffs' feeling of worth and responsibility and therefore motivation. It is of course important to check their workload prior to delegating to ensure that you are not swamping staff, which could reduce motivation and productivity.

For further information on how Incite Coaching can help you gain work life balance or with your career transition, visit our website [www.incitecoaching.com.au](http://www.incitecoaching.com.au), call us on 02 9560 4407 or email us at [info@incitecoaching.com.au](mailto:info@incitecoaching.com.au)

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