
Work-Life Balance

By Armando Cano Anzures

Not long ago, I came across team members who would wrap up their tasks ten minutes before the end of their shift and line up at the time clock to punch out right on the dot before heading home. When I asked them why, their answer was simple: they wanted their work-life balance to be respected. What happened? Why is there no longer any appreciation for hard work and long hours? And what exactly do they mean by work-life balance?

Origins: A Career Built on Long Hours

I landed my first job just a couple of months after finishing my studies. Thanks to a referral — and the unfortunate accident of my predecessor — I found myself in charge of an industrial maintenance crew at Salem de México. I was thrilled not to have spent much time job hunting after graduating, and to start earning a steady paycheck.

That excitement faded quickly. The new job imposed shifts of over 12 hours a day, Monday through Saturday, plus half a day on Sundays. Back then, the idea of work-life balance never crossed my mind. I was just happy to have a job — engineering positions in my hometown were genuinely scarce.

A couple of years later, working at an automotive electronics maquiladora near the border, my habits hadn't changed. Even though no one asked me to, I was soon back to twelve-hour days Monday through Friday and half a day on Saturdays. A more experienced colleague pulled me aside and asked me to stop — he feared our manager would notice and start demanding the same from everyone. I remember feeling offended by the request, and I chose to ignore it entirely.

Years later, at a Japanese company, I came to truly understand the work ethic of my Japanese colleagues. Not only did they put in over twelve hours on the plant floor, but they would cross from Reynosa to McAllen to keep working well past midnight. The unspoken rule: don't leave before they do, or face a disapproving look and a strained relationship.

This Isn't a New Concept

The term "work-life balance" has been around since the late 1980s. It didn't gain widespread use in Mexico until the early 2000s, evolving from "quality of work life" into a recognized driver of employee turnover — especially among executives.

Is This Really a Generational Issue?

I keep seeing posts where young professionals at the start of their careers walk out right when their shift ends and refuse to handle work matters outside of hours. And yet, in my experience, I've also met young people the same age who are just as committed as I was thirty years ago. What makes the difference?

My view: blaming the generational gap is the easy — and wrong — answer that managers reach for when they can't see that the problem is themselves. Discretionary effort beyond working hours only happens when people are truly committed to the organization's goals and to their leader. When that bond exists, they're willing to go the extra mile when it counts, even without additional pay.

The Leader's Role: Commitment, Mission, and Personal Connection

To build that commitment, a leader must be genuinely competent in the department's work and able to communicate its purpose compellingly — instilling a sense of mission in the team. They must also forge

real personal connections that reveal what motivates each team member, and help them align those motivations with their daily work. Letting someone with young children attend school events, for example, generates the goodwill that makes them willing to stay late when something truly urgent comes up.

A good leader also needs to understand that not everything can be urgent. Making extra effort a constant expectation quickly erodes the team's confidence that their time is being used wisely — and their trust in the person leading them.

Leadership as the Answer to Work-Life Balance

Getting those extra hours from your team — and ensuring their contributions are high-quality — comes back to your ability to lead and inspire genuine commitment. In my experience, when you have someone who is truly committed to their work, positive results follow.

What do you think? What has your own experience been with work-life balance? I hope you'll share your perspective and help enrich this conversation.

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