

# *Building work life balance for your team*

How to keep your people happy, healthy and motivated



# Contents

The benefits of a good work life balance for your teams

How many hours do people work?

Ensuring your team has a good work life balance

The role of technology

Flexible working

How to spot when your staff are overworked

Work life balance at dn&co



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You'll also read advice from Sage's Stephanie Wright. Stephanie has over 10 years' experience in HR, in a variety of roles across a range of businesses. She constantly reviews our People Policies and processes, ensuring they're aligned to our strategy and legislation, continuing to make Sage a great place to work.

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# *The benefits of a good work life balance for your teams*

As employers, we know that we should help our staff to achieve a good work life balance. It's the right thing to do. But when you're busy it can be hard to focus on this, rather than other aspects of your business like cash flow or bringing in new business.

But a good work life balance can take your company to the next level. Here's some of the benefits:

## **Increased productivity**

Research by the Corporate Executive Board shows that employees who feel they have good work life balance work 21% harder than those who don't. Staff are more likely to be more engaged, improving the amount and quality of their work. And because they have a healthy amount of downtime, they're also less likely to take time off due to stress or illness.

## **Easier recruitment**

For smaller businesses, it can be challenging to compete with the big boys to recruit staff. By offering a great work life balance, you could tip things in your favour by offering a better working environment.

Research by Arise shows that 58% of workers would take a pay cut to be able to work from home and 25% would be happy with a lower salary if they could avoid their commute. So if you can offer this type of flexible working, you may be able to reduce your wage costs too.





### **Improved staff retention**

More important than salary, having a good working environment keeps staff happy and motivated and helps you keep their skills in your business. According to research by Bayt, 88% of employees would consider changing their job for a better work life balance.

### **Nicer working environment**

No one wants to work in an office where the stress is palpable. While you may have pressured projects from time to time, keeping things in perspective and allowing staff to find a balance between work and home makes for a better place to work.

### **Better customer service**

Your customers are the lifeblood of your business, so anything you can do to improve your service is critical. You may find that you can open longer hours by offering flexible working to cover the shifts. In addition, staff who are happy and engaged are likely to be friendlier, have more patience and be willing to go the extra mile.

### **Excellent word of mouth**

It's not just customers who talk about your business; your staff do too. If they're happy in their role and feel valued, they're more likely to say positive things, which in turn makes it easier to find new customers and employees.





# How many hours do people work?

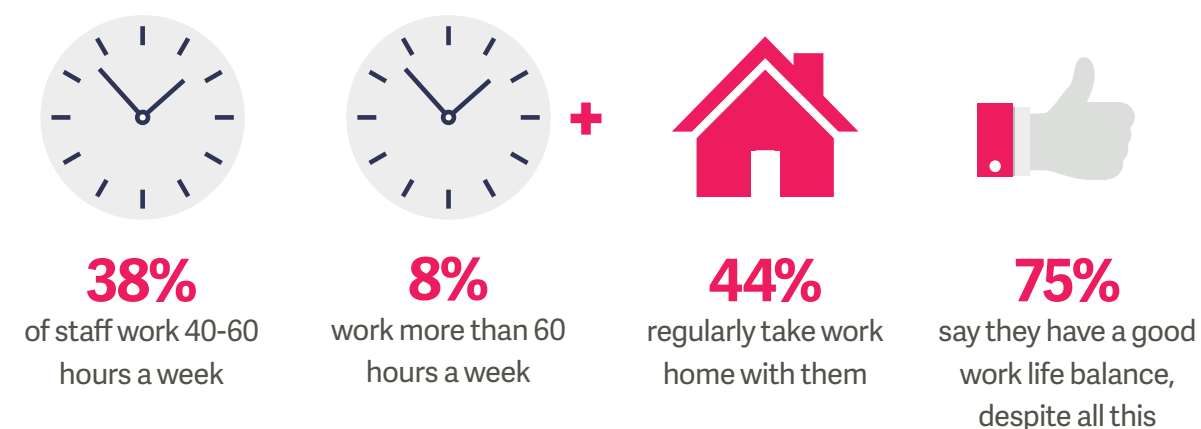
There is often said to be a culture in the UK for people to work long hours. We were once notorious for having the longest working hours in Europe.

The recession led to a reduction in hours, mostly due to employers asking workers to go part-time in a bid to reduce wage bills while retaining staff. That change led to a 40% reduction in hours worked and with it, a change in culture.

But, as many predicted, as the economy began to pick up in 2010, the number of hours we worked increased too. In fact, by 2011 we were working the third longest hours in Europe - an average of 42.7 hours.

Keeping an eye on the number of hours your staff work is an important part of achieving a healthy work life balance but it's only one element, as our research shows...

## Do staff feel they have a work life balance?







## Ensuring your team has a good work life balance

So, if it's not solely about keeping an eye on hours, what else is needed for a good work life balance? A mix of different elements will help you to provide your team with the right tools so they can manage their time effectively.

### The right company culture

For employees to have a healthy work life balance, you need to offer the right culture for it to thrive. This means having a set of beliefs and values within your business that supports flexible working and allows staff the chance of advancing their career based on their value to the business, rather than the hours they work.

The expectations that you set will have a huge impact on staff morale and affect whether they will take advantage of flexible working opportunities. Here's some ways that you can provide a work life culture:

- Don't expect employees to work long hours and ensure they are able to take breaks.
- Offer informal ways for people to take time out of the office. Giving opportunities to make up the time makes it easy for staff to keep appointments.
- Make sure you offer flexible working (a legal requirement from 30 June 2014).
- Assess performance based on results rather than time in the office.
- Avoid clock watching and keeping tabs on employees unless their time management is having a detrimental effect on work or they're not working contracted hours.
- Encourage your staff to use all their holiday allocation but allow them to carry days to a new holiday year if work has been busy. Having staff at work rather than on leave offers a short-term benefit but has long-term costs in terms of increased sickness, burn-out and staff turnover.
- Make it clear that work life balance is important and that staff should raise any concerns. Your people should feel able to discuss their workloads without feeling that their abilities or time management is being questioned.
- Encourage a culture of innovation. In some businesses, staff believe they have to look busy all the time. Make it clear that it's OK to take time out to think - your business will reap the benefits.



**Staff involvement**

Work life balance varies for different people depending on their working style and the stage they are in their life. Younger staff may have very different wants and needs to those with dependants or those approaching retirement.

Listen to staff and discuss what works for them. Consider all suggestions for how work life balance could be improved and make sure you share what’s available.

Finally, try to model a good work life balance yourself. It shows that the culture is not merely lip-service and that you’re committed keeping your work and home life balanced.

**What are the most important elements for a good work life balance?**

Business owners and employees say that the main ingredient for a good work life balance is:



*"Organising social events can be a great way for your employees to let off steam and enjoy themselves, but they can also be beneficial for your business. Giving your staff the opportunity to socialise at company events, like quarterly gettogethers, can build important relationships within teams and keep everyone up to date with everything going on in the business"*



*"One size doesn't fit all. It's important to understand your people's needs; what is it that motivates them? When you fully understand your people you'll know what will work best for them and ultimately be the best solution for your business."*





# *The role of technology*

With the rise of smart phones, apps and the ability to work remotely, technology has become both a benefit and a burden. When we speak to our customers they often say that they feel under pressure to keep up and that technology has created an “always on” culture. On the other hand, it’s also opened up more opportunities for working more flexibly.

## **Time to disconnect?**

To make sure technology is helping rather than hindering your business, it’s important to set expectations with your staff and your customers.

- If you don’t need to work outside business hours: tell customers when you’re available and encourage staff to only reply within those times.
- If you need to be available for customer support outside office hours: make sure your employee’s working arrangements formally reflect that they offer this type of support, rather than expecting staff to pick up emails out of hours.





## Business vs personal hardware

With the rise of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), there's less of a divide between home and work communications.



Staff use personal devices for work in **81%** of companies



**23%** of staff have answered work emails in bed

Try to set some boundaries and encourage staff to either disconnect their emails or turn off alerts out of hours.

## Keep a balance

If you do ask staff to respond to emails out of hours or make use of technology to work from home, remember that it works both ways.

There may be times when staff would like to use technology for personal use during working hours, whether it's updating Facebook, booking event tickets or bidding on eBay. Be flexible - a few minutes here and there won't make a difference to the business but will help build a better work life balance.

This is particularly key during big sporting events. Live streaming the World Cup or checking the score at Wimbledon can make the office more sociable. Just make it clear what's acceptable and enjoy the fun.

France has introduced new labour laws to protect workers from responding to emails after 6pm.





# Flexible working

This is just one element of work life balance but it's become increasingly important. New legislation introduced on 30 June 2014 means all employees have the legal right to request flexible working. Before this date, employers only had to offer it to parents and carers.

Flexible working can include a number of different options, including:

- Compressed hours
- Part-time working and job shares
- Flexi-time
- Alternative hours
- Working from home or outside the office



*"If you decide to offer a flexible working solution, whether it's working from home or changing shift patterns, make sure you set objectives: How often do you want to communicate? How will success be measured?"*

*Also, set time aside to review the arrangement - is it still beneficial for both parties?"*



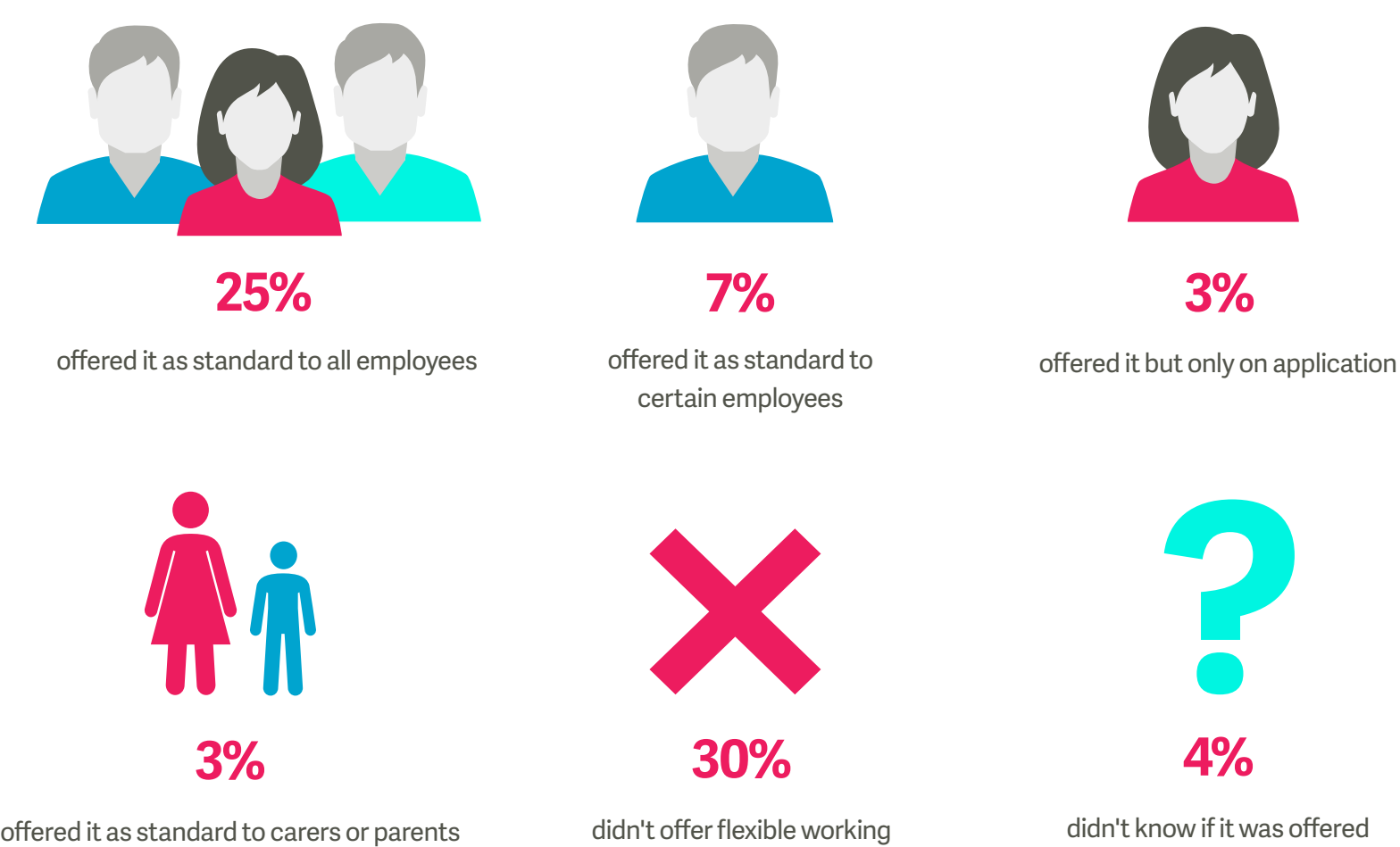


**What you must do to keep within the law**

- Communicate with staff about the changes.
- Set up a standard process for handling requests. This should cover how to make a request, how it will be considered, how staff will be informed of the decision and how to appeal.
- Make sure you can meet timescales. You must complete the process within 3 months of the date your employee applies.
- Know when you can refuse requests. There’s only certain reasons you can do this.

For more information about flexible working, visit the [Government website](#).

**By July 2014, businesses offered the following flexible working opportunities to staff:**





# *How to spot when your staff are overworked*

With a good work life balance within your business, we hope you'll never need this section. But, even with the best intentions, it is possible for your staff to become overwhelmed. If they don't feel able to raise this with you, it's important that you and your managers can spot the warning signs.

## **What to look out for:**

- Increased absenteeism and sickness
- More errors in their work
- Changes in temperament - this might be extreme reactions or emotional blankness
- Loss of motivation or confidence
- Missing breaks or lunch
- Sending emails late at night or other signs of working at home
- Working late in the office on a regular basis
- Poor memory
- An increase in number of complaints or grievances



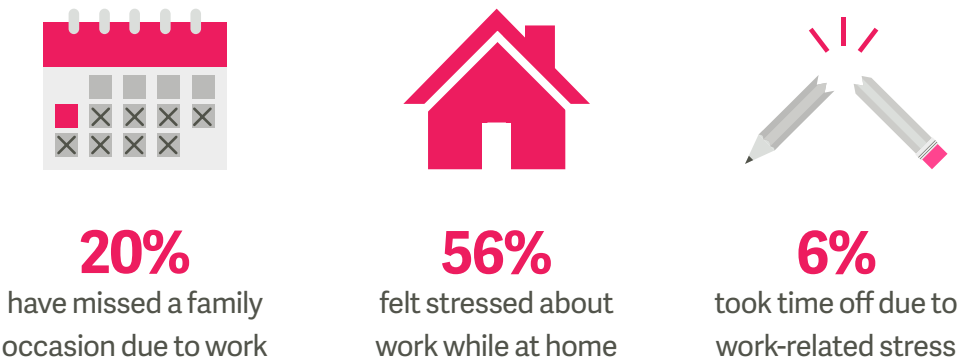


**What you should do**

If you have a member of staff who is showing signs of stress, it's important to address it. Under health and safety law, you have duties to assess and take measures to control risks from work-related stress. You also have a duty under common law to take reasonable care to protect your employees.

The first step is to give employees the opportunity to talk about issues causing stress. Be sympathetic and supportive and listen to their views. Once they have explained the issue, work together to identify ways that they can restore their work life balance. There may be several different options so try to find the one that works best for your employee and the business.

But there are signs that things are improving. Although the levels of time off due to work-related stress has stayed the same, in the last 12 months the percentage of staff missing events is down 4% and worrying about work at home is down 8%.



*"Employee benefits can really improve your staff's wellbeing as well as being a great incentive when attracting the best talent. Think broadly about employees in terms of physical, mental, social and professional wellbeing. At VCCP we try to cover all these aspects with employee benefits including a subsidised on-site massage service, a counseling programme and a buddy scheme for our new starters."*

*"It is important to regularly check in with your staff to make sure they're healthy and happy at work. We run an annual agency wide health check using an anonymous online survey with some face-to-face interviews to get feedback from our employees. This year's health check resulted in a new training programme and 'pub quiz' social initiative."*





# Work life balance at dn&co

Staff are one of a company's biggest assets, so recruiting the right team is vital. For Joy Nazzari, Managing Director at branding agency dn&co, attracting the best people means offering the right culture. And that includes a good work life balance.

"In order to get great talent, it's worth being flexible about time and understanding that people have a work life balance," she says. "What you end up with is a much happier business: you're getting great quality work in the hours you put together."

dn&co prides itself on a modern approach which is something they apply to their working environment too.

"Our studio is a wonderful place to work. We're a 9-6 business and about half the studio has families. We want to be able to go home and see them. It's the most important thing for us."

"For us flexible working is not a strategy, it's just the way the world is."



*Joy Nazzari,  
Managing Director,  
dn&co*

To find out more go to:  
**[sage.co.uk/businessadvice](https://sage.co.uk/businessadvice)**