

Building a Strong Work-Life Web

Kimberly Willson

27 June 2019

With the shifting of demands and the fluid nature of work in the 21 century, youth workers must start to ask the question: “what work mean’s to them and how does it fit

into their lives”? As mental health awareness becomes more prevalent, it’s crucial that young workers consider the importance of work-life balance to equip themselves for a happy and fulfilling life. In a report featured in *The American Psychological Association Journal* titled, *Public Policy, Work and Families: The Report of the APA Presidential Initiative on Work and Families (APA, 2004)*, the authors acknowledge the challenges faced by working families and their employees, and the subsequent need to realign the world of work with the realities of working families. As young peoples enter the workforce, the biggest challenge they will face is how to balance it all. Two aspects of work-life balance to consider for new and young workers is the aspects of ‘unpaid’ work as well as the complexities of multiple life roles.

The aspect of unpaid work is a topic that has not garnered the awareness it deserves and requires. As youth and young people begin their careers they may not be aware of the boundary between paid and unpaid work. Young workers are enthusiastic about starting their careers and at times employers may take advantage of this enthusiasm by allowing or encouraging workers to put in time that will not be properly compensated for. This may look like an hour or two a day or week being put in or a young worker continuing to work over their lunch hour; this time can add up substantially over a month. Workers might be too insecure to ask for compensation or they might not be aware of their rights through a collective agreement, should they be fortunate enough to be unionized. But even if unionized, workers may feel pressured to work outside of the collective agreement in ways sometimes unbeknownst to them. Educating young workers on the importance of working within the contexts of collective agreements, employment laws and standards and encouraging them to access union or

other representation is important to ensure they are protected, honoured for their contributions and compensated fairly. Unpaid work cuts into time that should be devoted to family needs or self-care. Feeling obligated to provide unpaid work is one sure fire way to tip the balance away from a healthy work-life balance.

Another aspect to the challenges of work-life balance faced by youth workers is the need to build an awareness of the multiple roles they have in life. The idea of multiple life roles is a recognition of all the ways and roles in which we play out our lives, such as: occupational roles, family roles, social roles, caregiver and personal care roles. It's important for youth to recognize the interwovenness of work roles and other family-life roles. Life roles don't end when work roles begin and vice versa. Understanding and navigating this work-life balancing act is important to release the burden of 'trying to make it all work'. Equipping young workers with tools to help them integrate all aspects of life into one domain is crucial for a healthy and satisfying work-life. Understanding and being aware of resources available to them such as paternity leave, special leave, sick leave, room for professional development, as well as flexible work hours can help with ensuring that all aspects of life get the attention they need and deserve. These resources can be accessed through asking questions and setting up these requests during the negotiate period of new employment. Otherwise these benefits can and should be accessed through the collective agreement if the worker is fortunate enough to be in a unionized workplace. Having these benefits may be worth more than a higher salary option; more money doesn't always equal a happier life.

When I entered the workforce at 22 years of age, I was not aware of the importance of a fair collective agreement, as well I did not have the self-awareness to know what I needed to live a balanced work-life. As a healthcare worker I work shift: nights, on-call as well as working many hours alone. This type of work has caused me to sometimes feel alienated, exhausted and frustrated which spills over into other relationships and aspects of my life. I've had to learn to set boundaries and allow time for intimacy and other fulfilling activities to flow within my non-work domain. Though at times my day off was used up recuperating from a 7 day stretch of shift work. I wish I had been made aware of the tools available to me to help cope and navigate these new experiences in my life. I now know to honour the importance of the multiple roles in my life and relish the joy I receive through these. I have learned that living a balanced work-life is one of the most important contributors to positive mental health and I am fortunate to work in a unionized workplace where appropriate benefits are provided to me in order to achieve this.

To the young workers entering the workforce today, I say to you: the sometimes competing threads of work and life need to be a beautifully interwoven web. Empower yourself by equipping with the attitudes required to honour yourself and educating yourself so to live a satisfying and joyful life as you enter into the next stages of your career. Especially in the beginning days of a young worker's career achieving this realization is so important in order to provide future health and longevity.

References

Public Policy, Work, and Families: The Report of the APA Presidential Initiative on Work and Families. (2004). PsycEXTRA Dataset. doi:10.1037/e307772005-001