

Work/Life Balance Increasingly Important to Senior Executives

Even the allure of a lucrative job promotion and hefty salary increase may be inadequate in its appeal if it negatively affects a senior executive's work/life balance, a recent poll revealed. Such beliefs will only increase in years to come, say experts.

By Barbara Worthington

One-quarter of senior executives worldwide would turn down a promotion that negatively affects their work/life balance, according to a recent poll of more than 1,300 senior executive by the New York-based Association of Executive Search Consultants.

In addition, the survey found that more than half of the executives (56 percent) would consider declining such a promotion.

Most executives polled range in age from 35 to 54, with 41 percent working in companies with sales in excess of \$1 billion.

"This should be a wake-up call to every employer," says Peter Felix, president of AESC. "Top senior executives are hard to come by. And this survey suggests that executives are beginning to carefully measure the cost of their personal lives against the value of their professional goals."

Almost nine in 10 executives (87 percent) indicated that work/life balance considerations are critical to deciding whether or not to accept a job or remain with an employer. About six in 10 (59 percent) said new technologies, such as the BlackBerry and cell phones, have negatively affected their leisure time.

The poll also revealed that nearly half (46 percent) of the executives admitted their work/life balance has changed for the worse in the past five years while about half (53 percent) said they have failed to achieve a satisfactory work/life balance.

"The balance of power between employers and senior executives has shifted with the executive now in the driver's seat," Felix says. "Employers need to be more creative and nimble in today's market and some negotiating tactics may include being more sensitive to candidate work-life balance needs. If employers don't listen, their competitors surely will."

Judi Casey, director of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network at Boston College Graduate School of Social Work, says studies support the premise that senior-level executives sometimes lower professional aspirations when they believe "a promotion might have an influence on their work/life balance."

That's certainly true of younger workers, she says, who hold more "family-centric" goals. "Gen X and Gen Y [employees] are saying that they don't want to work like their parents used to work," Casey says. "Family is just as important to them as work is."

Where work/life balance is concerned, there's "a convergence of economic forces as well as personal-aspiration forces that come into play," says Paul Sanchez, global director of employee research at New York's Mercer Human Resource Consulting. "Work/life balance is a very strong cultural artifact."

Employers really do control and manage a company's work/life balance, he says, and certain sectors more readily lend themselves to establishing a successful and accommodating balance. For example, professional services firms and the information knowledge sector "do well" in that regard, Sanchez says. "They have a lot of flexibility."

On the other hand, product- and manufacturing-oriented industries and public utilities experience more difficulty in striking the delicate work/life balance, due to "unrelenting schedules" and "requirements for people to be in place to do specific jobs," he says. "They're much more constrained and it requires very confined parameters."