

Employees Want the Next President's Agenda to Make Work Life Flexibility Easier for Companies and Individuals

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2007 WORK+LIFE FIT REALITY CHECK INCLUDE:

- More want to work differently than work less; only 5 percent favor reducing work schedule by more than 10 hours
- Almost 9 out of 10 believe work life flexibility would have either a positive or neutral effect on customer service
- Nearly 40 percent view work life flexibility as a growth strategy for their company, not just an employee perk
- More than half have more work life flexibility this year compared to last

December 6, 2007 – Nearly 60 percent of those surveyed in the 2007 Annual Work+Life Fit Reality Check believe the next president should introduce legislation that would make it easier for organizations to offer and individuals to have more work life flexibility. The telephone survey of a national probability sample of 900 full-time employed adults was sponsored by Work+Life Fit, Inc., conducted by Opinion Research Corporation November 1 - 5 and has a margin of error of +/- 3 percent.

“While work life flexibility has been a prominent issue in political campaigns in other countries such as Australia, Great Britain and New Zealand, it’s a blip on the U.S. political radar screen. Only two presidential candidates have so far addressed the issue,” said noted work life flexibility strategist and author Cali Williams Yost, president of Work+Life Fit, Inc. Yost typically categorizes the issue as “work life fit.” The Annual Work+Life Fit Reality Check, first conducted in 2006, is designed to monitor progress from the individual’s point of view.

Findings Counter Recent Research: Working Differently More Important Than Working Less

When asked what is the single most important change they would make to their jobs, respondents (51%) chose options that entailed working differently over making more money. When considering a different work style, 35 percent of those surveyed rated flexibility as most important and 16 percent rated responsibilities that better use their talents.

Of the 35 percent who chose flexibility, only 5 percent said reducing their schedule by more than 10 hours was most important. This was equal for men and women and counters previous research suggesting more people are interested in “part-time” employment. Working the same number of hours but with a more flexible schedule was most important to 13 percent, while 10 percent would opt to cut their schedule by 1 to 10 hours and 7 percent would prefer to work from a location outside the office.

“The perpetuating myths that people want to work significantly fewer hours and that work life flexibility means working less are simply not true,” said Yost. “Most employees don’t want to work less, they just want to work differently in a way that better utilizes their talents or is a better fit with the rest of their lives’ demands and desires.”

That’s the case for employees of national accounting firm BDO Seidman, LLP, the 2007 winner of the Alfred P. Sloan Award for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility in association with the Families and Work Institute’s When Work Works program. BDO Seidman’s Houston office has a virtual team of 10 employees who live in Austin and work from their homes and clients’ offices. Jay Duke, the firm’s southwest region assurance leader, believes the team’s flexible work life situation was a big factor

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in winning a new client engagement. A major Austin-based company awarded BDO their business in part because of the local presence of the team who live and work in the area, even though BDO does not have an official office in that market.

“Work life flexibility gave us a competitive advantage,” said Duke. “We view flexibility as a core part of our 21st century global business strategy. By strategically managing how, when and/or where work gets done, everyone in the firm has the opportunity to achieve the work life fit that meets their personal needs and the needs of the business.”

Work Life Fit: A Growth Strategy that May Lead to Better Customer Service

As the BDO customer win shows, work life flexibility may positively impact customer relationships. Almost 9 out of 10 employees surveyed believe work life flexibility would have either a positive or neutral effect on their ability to serve their colleagues or customers. When respondents were asked to finish the sentence, “If you had more work life flexibility,” 27 percent said, “clients/customers would expect better service because I’d be a more satisfied employee” and 50 percent said “it would not matter.” Only 12 percent felt their customers might worry about service levels if employees had more work life flexibility.

Younger employees (36%) ages 25 to 34 were significantly more confident than employees ages 45 to 64 that their colleagues or clients would receive the same or better service. Men (87%) and women (85%) were close to equal in their views that work life flexibility would have a positive or neutral effect on customer relationships.

“Those organizations that worry about work life flexibility affecting customer service create an unnecessary obstacle,” Yost said. “Work life fit should be designed as a business growth strategy to manage work flow, talent, time and resources so organizations and individuals can grow successfully and serve their clients in a 24/7 global workplace.”

In fact, nearly 40 percent of those surveyed view work life flexibility in their company as a strategy “your employer uses to help retain talent, manage the workload and to grow” compared to 20 percent who felt their companies viewed flexibility simply as an employee perk. Men (41%) were significantly more likely than women (32%) to view work life flexibility as a growth strategy.

“Work life fit has traditionally been more of a personal care giving related issue for women. For most men, it’s not as emotional, so they are better able to objectively see the business benefits of work life fit and grasp the strategic value to their company growth,” Yost said. “As more men and women see work life fit as a strategic growth imperative, it will become part of the day to day business operations.”

Progress: More Reporting Work Life Fit, But Gap Remains for Singles and Older Employees

One-fourth of those surveyed reported they already had enough work life fit, up from 15 percent in 2006. More than half (54%) of the respondents felt they had more flexibility now than at this time last year, but 45 percent said they didn’t.

Men (56%) more than women (50%), and households with children (58%) compared to those without children (50%), reported more work life fit this past year. But the flexibility gap remains for both single and older employees. Three-plus person households compared to single households were significantly more likely to feel:

- They had more work life flexibility this year than last
- They were more comfortable discussing the issue and their needs with their supervisors
- Their company as a whole was more supportive of work life fit

The same is true of employees ages 25 to 34 compared to all other age groups.

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“There’s still a lack of comfort for singles and older age groups to pursue and believe that they too may need and can have work life fit,” Yost said. “With looming issues such as the retirement drain and increasing elder care demands, it’s critical companies and individuals address both the business and personal need for a work life fit strategy for all employees.”

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*Work+Life Fit, Inc. is a consulting firm that specializes in developing innovative flexibility strategies for organizations and individuals. Clients include BDO Seidman LLP, Ernst & Young, Quaker, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch and Microsoft, as well as thousands of individuals. President and founder Cali Williams Yost has been consulting since 1995, first at the Families and Work Institute and then Bright Horizons Family Solutions, two of the industry’s leading organizations. She is the author of the critically acclaimed *Work+Life: Finding the Fit That’s Right for You* (Riverhead/Penguin Group, 2005), writes the *Work+Life Fit Blog* available at www.worklifefit.com and is a regular contributor for other major blogs. Earlier this year Cali was named a 2007 Work-Life Rising Star by Alliance for Work-Life Progress.*

Editors/Reporters: Available upon request – Interviews with additional sources, research summary and complete data, and a Top 10 Tips guide about how to operationalize work life fit into your business as a growth strategy.

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