



Introduction

The vision of JK Corporate Services (JKCS for short) is to be the preferred accountant for companies in Singapore and the region. Her core values are professionalism, integrity and for her people: excellence. JKCS had adopted Work-Life Integration as far back as 2005 and was awarded the WOW! Fund the same year. Ms Jessie Low, founder of the company, firmly believes that Work-Life Integration has contributed to her employees' productivity which, in turn, improves business result.

Core business of JKCS is in accounting and auditing. Her business growth has been steady. Annual revenue of the company has grown from \$375,000 in 2005 to \$460,000 in 2006 and is heading towards \$1,058,000 in 2009. Staff strength has increased from 3 in 2003 to the current 12. Labour productivity has surged from \$37,500 in 2005 to \$56,426 in 2009. Employee satisfaction had risen from 60% in 2005 to 80% in 2006. Retention rate improved from 40% in 2005 to 90% in 2009. Absenteeism rate had dropped by 20% and medical reimbursement by 50% in year 2006

Cornerstone of JKCS' Work-Life Practices

According to Jessie, the cornerstone to JKCS' workable Work-Life Practices is through communication and realistic work-load management. The aim of the company is to help employees to effectively manage their work and personal responsibilities. Creating a friendly and supportive work environment helps to raise employees' morale and productivity. In turn, business operation becomes more efficient and correspondingly, customers' satisfaction has been elevated.

Implementing JKCS' Work-Life Practices

Implementing the Work-Life Practices has been an on-going process for Jessie and her managers. In expanding her businesses, Jessie cautiously combines flexibility with a measurement system to ensure that clients' projects are accomplished in the pre-determined deadline and that employees are not overly stressed. Based on her personal experiences, Jessie recognizes that business, professional and personal successes are closely intertwined.

At JKCS, Work-life Integration is seen as the intersection of organizational and employee values. But promoting Work-Life Integration requires conscious effort and determination. Some employees still believe in working long hours in order to meet project deadlines. Perseverance is required to keep the balance and to convince employees that Work-Life practices do work. What matters is conscious

planning and perhaps, a change to one's lifestyle. This calls for constant communication and interaction whereby Jessie and her managers are always on hand to convince employees that Work-Life practices do work to their benefit.



Flexible Work Arrangement

Besides showing by example the usefulness of Work-Life Integration, JKCS has incorporated the following Flexible Work Arrangement in the Company's policies and handbook:

1. Flexible Work Time

- a) All employees work a 40-hour week from Monday to Friday. They can apply for flexible starting and ending hours between 8:00am to 7:00pm .
- b) Employees are encouraged to leave an hour earlier on every Friday to spend time with their family.
- c) Employees are entitled to a one-hour lunch break taken anytime between 12:00pm to 2:00pm.
- d) Employees can apply for Job-Sharing or work Part-Time subject to approval by the company on a case-by-case basis.

2. Flexible Work Place

- a) Employees can apply for Telecommuting work arrangement by working from home, if the job scope permits, and subject to the company's approval on a case-by-case basis.

3. Leave Benefits

Over and above statutory leave requirement such as annual, medical/ hospitalization, maternity, childcare and infant leave, JKCS has instituted additional leave categories that are family-focused. These include:

- a) Birthday leave
- b) Marriage leave
- c) Paternity leave
- d) Family care leave
- e) Bereavement leave
- f) Study / Examination leave
- g) Emergency leave / Time-Off

4. Staff Engagement

Jessie engages her employees constantly as her aim is to create a happy and productive workplace. Not only does she meet with her employees on a weekly basis to discuss work matters, she and her managers connect with them informally at all times. There is an annual Company retreat for all employees to foster team spirit and to create a sense of belonging. There are gifts for employees who get married, give birth, or who



are hospitalized. Recreational programmes are also organized at appropriate time for bonding purpose.

5. Commitment To Training

JKCS is committed to people investment in the form of learning and development. This is to ensure that her employees are aligned to the company's business goals and achievements. It is also a useful means to reinforce JKCS' corporate values and beliefs. As her current staff strength is only 12, she needs to ensure that they are competent and effective. They need to multi-task and to acquire a variety of skills. This will enable the Company to respond to changing business requirements speedily and effectively.

To develop and retain her staff, the Company undertakes training and retraining of employees as required, whether formal, internal or external. This is to enable employees to maintain or develop their skills and knowledge. When employees are sponsored for external courses by approved trainers or reputable institutions, they may have to serve an undertaking or a period of bond. Employees interested to attend work-related courses / seminars can always discuss their requests with their supervisors.

Work-Load Management

Instituting Flexible Work Arrangement is a means to attract and retain talented and committed employees but it must make business sense. As clients are billed according to time cost, employees will need to work out a realistic timeline for project completion. Jessie firmly believes that employees should work an eight-hour day and not to overstress themselves by working long hours into the night.

Tangible And Intangible Benefits

Work-Life Integration is a long-term commitment and will only succeed if management takes an active interest and gives full support to the implementation and operation of the programme. In the case of JKCS, it has worked for Jessie as she grows her business. Most of her employees are working mothers and require flexibility in balancing their home and work lives. Tangible benefits of the programme have been demonstrated by increased sales, raised labour productivity, high retention rate, and improved employee job satisfaction rate shown in paragraph 2.

As for intangible benefits, JKCS is able to:

- a) Extend operating hours without increasing costs
- b) Save on office space and operating cost
- c) Cultivate a more focus and productive workforce
- d) Attract qualified housewives to return to the workforce
- e) Retain skilled and committed employees
- f) Maintain a pool of skilled, experienced, and dedicated part-time employees to cater to the seasonal peak demands.



Challenges And Future Growth

Albert Einstein had once said: 'Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.' JKCS has progressively tried to build balance to the work and personal time of her employees. Jessie and her managers understand that when too much goes into one area, the balance is off and this will generate issues and challenges.

Despite the positive statistics shown, Jessie feels that she has more to do in order to advance Work-Life Integration in JKCS. Her biggest challenge is how to get more accomplished within the stipulated number of hours. Some employees still work long hours in order to meet project deadline. For various reasons, they could not work at home and in the past, some had left as they could not take the stress or they felt that they were not suited to the job. In such cases, Jessie always carried out exit interviews to assess the causes of the attrition. As a caring leader, she has continuously tried to help her employees achieved their work goals without being overly stressed.

To better motivate and develop her employees, Jessie had segregated her company into six different companies dealing with auditing, bookkeeping, secretarial service, property investment, sales of software, and managing staff welfare benefits. These segregations are based on functions of her umbrella company now carved out into subsidiary companies. As a result, employees are now more focused and have more room to grow in their careers.

Jessie's had also advised her clients in Work-Life matters and so far, five of her clients had applied for the WOW! Fund. In fact, Work-Life Consultancy is one area that JKCS will focus on based on the needs and requirements of her clients.

Conclusion

From the case of JKCS, we can assess that Work-Life Integration is achievable and can benefit both Company and employees. It is a long-term commitment and a journey of choices, focus, and conscious effort to adapt and keep moving. Support from top management is vital and in this case, Jessie leads by example and communicates consistently with her employees to convince them that Work-Life strategies do work. At the same time, Jessie uses work-load management to measure employees' productivity. This arrangement has worked so far but requires constant monitoring and evaluation.