

World of Work: Out of the race

Do you feel you need a better work-life balance? **Gabrielle Monaghan** takes you through the options of how you can boost your quality of life

The stress of modern office life and commuting is taking its toll, leading many to pursue an escape from the rat race. As full employment tightens Ireland's labour market and makes recruitment a tiresome task, employers are increasingly willing to make more concessions to both existing staff and job candidates.

"I would recommend individuals seeking a better work-life balance talk to their employer before taking any action," says Paul Mullan, career coach and director of Measurability, a firm that helps companies assess and select new staff. "Many employers are realising that they cannot afford to lose good staff as they are hard to replace in this market."



Paul Mullan says it's important to strike a good balance between work and life

While rising house prices and longer commuting times are prompting some people to leave urban areas in search of a quieter life in the country, there are many ways to achieve a better balance between work and home life in the same role without relocating. Unfortunately, achieving a work-life balance is not an option for some people because companies in some sectors will not or cannot offer flexi-time or part-time work.

Luckily, there are still ways of gaining greater control over the number of hours you work in your particular sector. These include job sharing, working as a consultant from home, contract work and taking parental leave during school holidays. Job sharing is a system where two people take the responsibility for one full-time position, by dividing work, pay, holidays and other benefits between them.

Employers are often open to this concept because it reduces staff turnover and the upheaval associated with recruiting and training new staff, according to Jobshare.ie, which advertises job-sharing vacancies. Staff typically stay longer in a job if the hours suit their work-life balance.

Working from home, either by telecommuting or acting as a consultant, can also provide a boost to your work-life balance. If your employer is reluctant to allow this, consider whether this is an opportune time to set up your own business or become a consultant in your field. However, not everyone is cut out to run their own business. Not only do you need to do your homework, you have to remain alert to potential pitfalls as well as potential opportunities. Additionally, you need to be able to handle not having a steady income. This requires advance planning on your part and good money management.

It also requires the support of your family or others in your household. Without backup, there's a strong possibility that either your business won't succeed or you'll have a poor work-life balance and family relationships could be severely strained, sometimes irreparably.

Whatever path you choose to fulfil your dream of a greater work-life balance, most people who make the decision to work less will have to make financial sacrifices. However, those seeking to improve their quality of life are typically aware of the sacrifices they will make and feel the advantages outweigh any financial loss they may incur, according to Mullan.

Balance out your life

- Ask your HR manager or employer about the flexible working arrangements they offer

- If flexi-time or part-time work is not available in your sector, consider whether contract work would suit you
- Team up with a colleague who needs to spend more time at home and together approach your employer about job sharing
- Think about switching to professions that offer long holidays, such as teaching
- If you cannot afford childcare during your child's summer holiday, ask your employer for parental leave
- Relocate to less stressful rural areas with large employers
- For sectors such as PR or financial advice, it may be possible to set up your own consultancy at home.