

In many companies, mounting pressures lead to higher workloads and less emphasis on relaxation. Julia James makes a simple, but very convincing argument for the importance of work-life balance – especially in challenging times

The Benefits of Balance

What can participants to Julia James' HR Summit presentation look forward to learning?

- + Participants will appreciate James' fresh outlook and personal experience of the benefits of work-life initiatives. She will provide strategies on how to create a work-life balance culture and discuss more success stories from companies in Europe and North America. A passionate speaker, James is looking forward to sharing her ideas with companies in Singapore and helping them become champions of the work-life balance culture.



What do ocean tides, the changing of seasons and successful corporate environments have in common? They all operate on the concept of balance. When workers honour the natural fluctuations between periods of activity and relaxation, they learn to operate to their fullest abilities. In her upcoming HR Summit presentation, Julia James will address the pressing need for a balance between work and leisure, and how a healthy dose of both makes the perfect antidote to the difficulties that can arise in any organisation.

A life coach who inspires both individuals and corporate audiences, James became a supporter of work-life balance when she began working in a busy office. She says breaks there were non-existent, not even for lunch.

It was there that she first observed the importance of incorporating relaxation into her work. In defiance of the underlying corporate culture, she began taking small breaks, sometimes just a short walk around the office. She found that even these tiny recharge sessions had a positive impact on her overall work performance.

"I noticed that all my great ideas occurred not while I was working at a frenetic pace but rather when I got off my chair and walked a few steps. It dawned on me that taking time to relax and recharge is vitally important for inspiration and creativity."

Motivated by the impact of those small breaks, James began to incorporate 'mini-retreats' into her busy work days. Those short periods of rest and relaxation cleared her mind and allowed room for more productivity and

out-of-the-box thinking. She also found she had more energy at the end of each day, and she approached her tasks with a more positive attitude.

These changes eventually led her to dedicate her career to helping busy professionals achieve a healthy balance and sustainable success.

James believes that working in the modern business environment is especially taxing on people. "We have become accustomed to a constant state of activity and responsiveness," she says. The expectations of a rigid corporate culture bring about tremendous stress that employers are sometimes unaware of. The pressure to produce work without rest has a counter-effect. Productivity decreases, health is compromised and burn-outs are likely. Work-life balance is more important than ever now."

James encourages companies to invest in educating and coaching employees to take time to rest and recharge. She says this helps staff to stay healthy and produce sustainable performance results. Importantly, these sorts of work-life practices have a place in every organisation and every industry. "There should not be exceptions," she says. "Although some cultures and

industries are more flexible to work-life initiatives, the effort should transcend all boundaries." James recognises however, that the best ways to implement a balanced work-life culture will vary depending on the industry and the cultural context.

To prove that work-life balance leads to high achievements, James cites the success of the largest electricity distribution company in Europe. RWE Net, a German-based firm, uses a unique flexible work environment, including an employee involvement programme and in-house daycare facilities, to ensure staff wellbeing. Most notable is its wellness programme, which the organisation says has delivered a 300% return on its substantial US\$4.5 million investment.

As the economic downturn hits Singapore and the wider Asian region, there is a temptation to squeeze every last drop of labour from the available payroll. James says it isn't easy to release staff for breaks but it does have an important and positive impact on the bottom line of a business. She says work-life balance is a vital strategy that should elicit far more productivity over the long term. **HRM**

work-life balance in tough times

Should companies forsake their flexible work initiatives when financial challenges loom? Experts like Julia James discourage companies from taking leisure opportunities away from staff. If anything, she says work-life balance should be strengthened during these times.

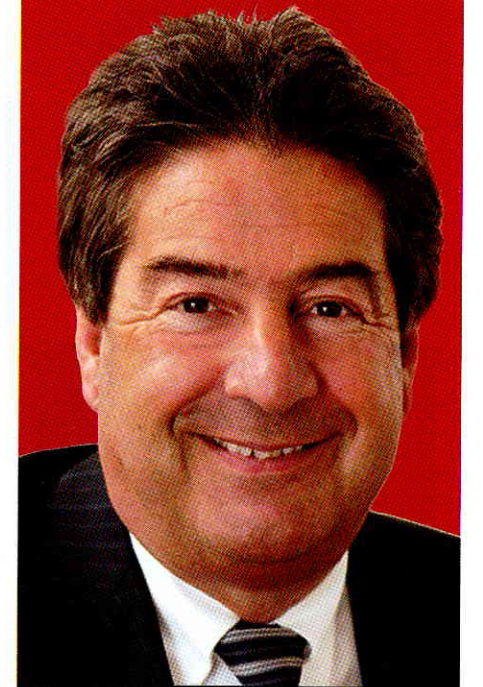
As corporations continue to downsize, those who remain employed face pressures both at work and at home. The right action can help staff cope with their difficulties.

Employers should provide support to their staff. Forums and office discussion group are useful outlets for staff to voice their concerns about issues at home as well as work. Companies should maintain flexibility and even consider relaxing rules to make telecommuting possible for staff so they are not in the office five days a week.

Prioritising is crucial during difficult times and companies must be clear about their main needs without forsaking their employees' wellbeing.

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