

Your Options

keeping our partners well-informed

In This Issue



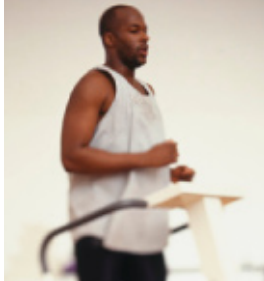
25 Years and Still Going Strong

Dean and Alan salute Workplace Options' 25th Anniversary, as well as some other exciting developments for the company. Hurry! There's cake in the conference room! [>read more](#)



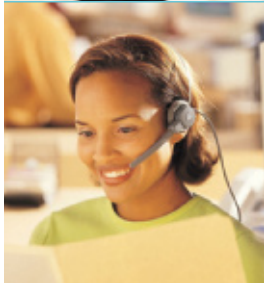
Balance Beyond Borders

Work-Life expert, Sharon O'Malley takes a cross-cultural look at work-life programs, and reveals that what works for U.S. employees can get lost in translation abroad. [>read more](#)



Employees Seek Fitness Guidance

Good news for employers. According to Lisa Zereski, recent poll results indicate employees are interested in improving their health. [>read more](#)



Consultant Proficiency Program

Stephanie Hastings, WPO's Director of Implementation and Service Quality, rolls out a new program that keeps Consultants on top of their game. [>read more](#)



News from the National Training Center

The monthly on-line seminar topics are gaining in popularity and participation has been strong. [>read more](#)

25th Anniversary Edition



2007 marks a significant milestone for us here at Workplace Options. We are celebrating our 25th year of providing cutting edge work-life solutions that are the best in the industry and we are extremely proud of the growth we've achieved.

25 Years and Still Going Strong

From our start as a small regional work-life consulting firm we have grown to be the largest provider of work-life services in this country. And we are still growing. In June of 2006 we acquired Employee Advisory Resource (EAR). EAR, which recently moved into a brand new state of the art call center in London, is one of the largest providers of employee effectiveness services in the United Kingdom. We expanded our reach even further at the start of this year with the acquisition of Dublin's EAP Solutions. Workplace Options now oversees a network of providers that provide services on four continents and in 80 countries.

We are very happy to announce some wonderful additions to our staff.

Jean-Baptiste Gruet joins Workplace Options in the role of Vice-President of Sales. JB has over 10 years of experience in business development and customer satisfaction in the human services industry. We are confident that his experience will greatly contribute to our continued growth.

Anne Medin joins us as Vice-President of Provider Relations. Anne brings with her a wealth of knowledge and experience in the development and management of provider networks in the work-life and behavioral healthcare industries. Please join us in welcoming them to our team.

We are also excited to announce another positive change. In May, we are moving to our new service center in Raleigh. Our new home, the headquarters of Workplace Options, is three times the size of our current center so that we can accommodate our tremendous growth. This growth is due in part to the popularity of our Back-Up Care Advantage product, offered in partnership with Bright Horizons.

We hope you will enjoy this edition of Your Options. Work-Life columnist Sharon O'Malley explores the importance of creating worldwide work-life interventions that take into account cultural differences in different countries. Our Director of Implementation and Service Quality, Stephanie Hastings, describes our newest service innovation, the Consultant Proficiency Program. Lisa Zereski, our Director of Content and Product Development provides the results of one of our latest polls. And Mary Ellen Gornick, Senior Vice-President of Union Services has a lot to share about our seminars and training programs.

Thank you for helping us to celebrate our 25th year!

Dean and Alan



SHARON O'MALLEY EXAMINES THE NEED FOR DIFFERENT APPROACHES WHEN PROVIDING EMPLOYEES

WORK-LIFE BALANCE BEYOND BORDERS

For people in 46 countries, achieving a better work-life balance ranked among the top three New Year's resolutions for 2007, underscoring that the tug-of-war between job and family reaches far beyond U.S. boundaries.

That ACNielsen survey confirms what Australian researchers Anne Bardoel and Helen De Cieri found last year in a study of the work-life strategies of multinational corporations: No matter where in the world people work, they're likely to share three common work-life struggles. First, their employers don't allow them as much flexibility as they'd like when it comes to when and where they do their work. Second, there's not enough high-quality, affordable dependant care close to their homes or jobs. And finally, they believe they have to work too many hours because they simply have too much work to do.

American companies have responded by offering work-life programs and EAP services to the foreign nationals and American expatriates who work for them in foreign locations. Yet it turns out that the same work-life remedies that help solve the child care and flexibility woes of the U.S.-based American worker don't necessarily translate well when U.S. firms export those benefits to other countries.

It seems there's no one-size-fits-all strategy when it comes to offering work-life benefits to employees who live in different cultures.

The trick to making it work, say those who have successfully incorporated work-life into the benefits they offer in foreign locations, is to consider the unique needs and cultural norms of each country as when crafting a new benefit. The biggest mistake

U.S. organizations make during this process, the experts agree, is projecting American values onto employees who are not Americans.

Some examples: It's not uncommon for two-income Chinese couples to send their preschoolers to boarding school from Monday to Friday so they can devote themselves to their jobs without worrying about day-care or dinnertime. Many American parents would scoff at the notion of separating from their youngsters for five days every week, but in China, the practice is considered good for the kids.

An American-minded HR manager might believe that an employee subsidy for day-care or an on-site after-school program would save these Chinese parents from missing their children all week. But she's likely to find the subsidy and after-care sorely underused—because Chinese parents are as happy as they can be with the arrangement they've already made.

Similarly, one U.S. work-life manager, noting the sizable portion of employees in her firm's overseas branches with school-age children, exported a version of a very successful U.S. backup child care program to those foreign locations. The employees answered with indignation, saying they would never leave their sick children in someone else's care, even if it meant they could go to work. "They were insulted," says the manager, who withdrew the option.

(continued)

Although work-life issues may be similar from country to country,

THE SOLUTIONS AREN'T NECESSARILY COOKIE CUTTER.

Although work-life issues may be similar from country to country, the solutions aren't necessarily cookie-cutter.

But reaching a tailor-made solution can begin with the same single step no matter where a worksite is located: an assessment of the needs and the culture of each work force in each country. The employer can use that data to create site-specific, culturally appropriate programs that solve the employees' work/family problems in a way that feels comfortable to them—even if that resulting benefit bucks American norms.

This approach really isn't new for American employers, who have learned over the years that work-life balance means different things to different employees, even if they're all American and they all work in the same location.

Older employees, for example, have more of a need for elder care than for the child care that the work-life program historically promoted, while young, single workers might be more interested in telework than in a backup care benefit. When businesses want to spend their work-life dollars most efficiently, they first poll their workers to learn how old they are, how many are parents and whether they really need or want the boss's help with specific issues. Assuming they all want the perks that the HR staff deems important can lead to underused benefits and a work force whose work-life needs are unmet.

Likewise, it's smart to listen to the local voices when crafting a benefits strategy for a foreign location. In fact, benefits experts advise businesses to allow each location some autonomy in choosing which work-life perks to offer its own employees—and to

find champions among the senior staff at that location to promote and model the use of the benefits.

Planners, of course, should not ignore the company's American employees who work in other countries. American workers bring their values and expectations with them when they relocate for their jobs. Ex-pats often find themselves unhappily following American rules in countries where the rules are much different—or vice versa: They want what they had at home, even though their foreign colleagues are demanding something else altogether.

An example: Foreign-based American employees might resent their U.S. companies if they don't match the lengthy paid vacations that their European colleagues enjoy, or if their pay or benefits are cut because they moved to a country with a lower cost of living or where fewer benefits are the norm.

One large company addressed this issue by linking each employee's compensation and benefits to the worker's home country.

Even with careful consideration of cultural issues, though, employers might not be able to solve all of their staffs' non-work woes. The ACNielsen survey on New Year's resolutions, after all, identified three top resolves among those who work all over the world. The other two? Losing weight and avoiding bad relationships.

Sharon O'Malley is a nationally published journalist specializing in work-life issues.

According to the February 2007 poll, readers of the Advantage Web are in dire need of a fitness muse. The poll questioned “What is your fitness lifestyle?” and offered reader responses to cover *dedicated fitness buffs to unabashed couch potatoes*.

Employees Seek Fitness Guidance

By Lisa Zereski, Director of Product and Content Development

Seventeen percent of those who took the survey indicated that they strictly adhered to a workout regime. Twenty-two percent shared that they make unscheduled time for exercise by walking the dog or taking a quick run around the block. Sports kept 7 percent of the respondents active. Most interestingly, the vast majority of respondents, 50 percent, indicated that “I am looking for inspiration.”



This represents a great opportunity for employers interested in improving their bottom line by improving their employees’ health. Employees are interested in adding fitness to their lifestyle but are looking for a muse (and probably some guidance and support). Employers who give their employees that extra boost can expect to see a return in the form of a healthier, more positive and productive workforce.

And, it doesn’t have to be compulsory, time-consuming or expensive. Try some “grassroots” options – lunchtime walking groups or an after-work athletic team. Try a few different activities to appeal to employees of varying degrees of physical fitness and skill – croquet, kickball, biking. If you have a little bit of money to use for awards, inspire a little competition between departments or locations to achieve goals as a team such as the most miles walked in a week-month-year’s time. If you host an annual party, think about an event that provides an opportunity for activity instead of the just high-calorie appetizers and staid music. Playing together will also have the added benefit of building rapport as well as fitness.

For long-term inspiration and unlimited access to a professional coach, consider Wellness Coaching for employees. For details on Wellness Coaching, speak with your Account Representative.

At Workplace Options, we are sure we have the best Consultants in the business with our extensive training and 3-tiered quality monitoring system. We decided to go a step further and quantify and validate our training programs, while providing an innovative Career “path” within the Consultant position. Workplace Options presents the Consultant Proficiency Program.

Consultant Proficiency Program

By Stephanie Hastings, Director of Implementation and Service Quality



The Consultant Proficiency Program is a structured program of requirements that place our Consultants into certain recognized levels of knowledge or proficiency. The levels include Basic, Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum. With the diligent work of Toni Smith, Manager of Service Quality and the content Team Leads, the Basic Proficiency Level testing was completed in November of 2006. All Consultants are required to pass the Basic Proficiency Level yearly to retain their position. All other levels are optional choices based on individual goals for each Consultant. The Basic Level consists of 3 timed and monitored tests which evaluate the Consultants’ understanding of process flow/computer skills; consultation abilities (active listening skills, required intake questions); and content team specific knowledge (Child Care, Elder Care, Daily Living, Legal/Financial).

This program:

- Provides opportunities for Consultants to leverage their knowledge base in training others
- Provides opportunities for Consultants to become internal content “experts”
- Provides professional growth and transferable skill development
- Creates environment that values learning and training
- Ultimately improves the quality of the consultations provided to callers

As of March 2007, 99 percent of the Consultants have completed the Basic Level with a combined test score of 90 percent or higher. This process has helped us identify 3 areas in our basic training that need to be clarified or improved going forward. Overall, it validated that our current training process is successful and information is retained and used appropriately during Consultations.

Later in 2007, the Proficiency Program will be further refined for the higher levels with on-going training opportunities, updates and progress charts for those Consultants participating.

“I look forward to the monthly on-line seminars. They are informative, always giving me a new perspective. Thank you for this service!”

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL TRAINING CENTER

By Mary Ellen Gornick, Senior Vice President



The monthly on-line seminar topics are gaining in popularity. In 2006 on-line seminar participation was very strong. Overall, we had a total of 1681 registrations, approximately 140 participants per month. In 2007, we are on pace to greatly exceed the 06 experience. In the first quarter, there were almost 1,000 registrants. In fact, the interest has been so high that Workplace Options has introduced a second session each month to accommodate the demand.

In addition to the twelve (12) web topics offered in 2007, there are an additional 115 seminar topics offered in the National Training Center Catalogue. The topics cover a wide spectrum of child care, older adult/elder care, parenting, lifestyle, legal/financial and management content areas that are germane to everyday life. Each topic can be offered in a 60-minute session in either the face to face format or web.

Two products that are extremely popular are the monthly seminar package – twelve sessions offered via the web that can be customized to company culture and our Peer Discussion Groups, conducted telephonically focused on parenting issues and adult/elder care giving issues. Both products offer an excellent opportunity to connect participants with subject matter experts without the geographic constraints.

Contact your Account Manager to learn more about the product offerings through the National Training Center.