

Acknowledging Your Employees' Responsibilities

It would be difficult to imagine a company hiring only single people with no family responsibilities. Indeed, no company could survive such severe restrictions on its talent pool. When managers do hire individuals with families, however, they also assume the responsibility for dealing with the impact of family concerns on individual productivity. Ultimately the company's success may depend on how effectively managers deal with this challenge.

Today's families are different than families of the past. More than half of all mothers with children under the age of six are in the labor force. Women return to work after the birth of a baby sooner than they ever have before. In addition, there are more single parents supporting their children. New family lifestyles bring with them new problems and stresses that can influence work productivity.

New Rules Needed

Managers need new tools and skills to address the issues that changing family lifestyles have created. The old rules just don't apply anymore.

Managers must first accept the validity of employees' family responsibilities. They're real and they're here to stay; ignoring them or wishing they would go away won't help. The key to success in guiding employees through these largely uncharted waters is to keep beneficial solution to any conflict that may arise. Managers who recognize the legitimacy of employees' family demands are often rewarded with employees who try harder to find solutions to work/family conflicts.

Know What's Expected

On the other hand, employee also need to understand clearly what is expected of them. When family responsibilities keep them away from work, they need to know how much latitude exists with respect to project deadlines, making up missed time, and reassigning work to others. Employees can only be held accountable to the extent that management has made such expectations clear to them.

In essence, what's needed is a new philosophy of management. Tomorrow's management textbooks will include sections on managing employees with family responsibilities. Today's managers must make do with on-the-job training.

