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## **“Breaking Through the Age Generation Barrier”**

### **I. Proactive Approach to Work-Life Balance**

#### **A Brief History of Work-Life Balance**

While some may be more indicative than others, statistics regarding workplace tendencies show an ever-changing dynamic among those who are born in different years, decades, and even generations. A debatable question is whether work life balance ever existed when Baby Boomers were growing up. Those who grew up in the WWII era were exposed to a lot of hardships, their focus was on stability and tended to stay at companies for a long time. The proceeding generations witnessed this, evolving their priorities, continuously changing the way we work. Ultimately, we now are seeing perks like remote working, maternity and paternity time, even so much as game rooms and lounges in the workplace. Such statistics show the average worker in the United States works on average forty-seven (47) hours per week. Of the average amount worked per week, statistics indicate approximately twenty-seven percent (27%) of such work is done in a location outside of a traditional office setting. Employers in today’s climate are making more strides than previous years in ensuring employees have a work-life balance by offering remote workplaces and by becoming more health-conscious.

#### **Companies Have No Choice But to Adapt and React**

Employers in today’s climate are taking more strides than previous years in ensuring employees have a work-life balance through creative incentives. With advances in technology and the ability to become more flexible, workplaces are trending away from a “traditional” workplace in favour of remote workplaces. 56 percent of companies allow their employees to work remotely. Creating a flexible work environment is one of the best ways to satisfy the work-life balance needs of most employees – no matter which generation you belong to. In recent years, employers have not only encouraged, but also paid for gym memberships and other forms of exercise, including health technology and standing desks. The combination of flexibility of remote workplaces and new emphasis placed on workers’ health demonstrate the new trend of employers attempting to find the right work-life balance with each of its employees. However, finding a balance can be tricky between positive and negative generational perspectives.

With advances in technology and the ability to become more flexible, workplaces are trending away from a “traditional” workplace in favour of remote workplaces. Some positives of remote workplaces include possible increase of quality productive hours compared to a traditional workplace, ability of worker to work desired hours, and increased flexibility if needed to become mobile and still be able to work. However, in contrast, some negatives of remote workplaces can include a lack of assurance the worker is putting in the work required to do his or her job, lack of workplace comradery, and lack of quick and effective review and feedback to the worker. Technology enables employers and employees alike to be more flexible and be able to help work with one another to find a proper work-life balance.

This balance, however, is not a set line. The balance can change from worker to worker and from day to day. Some workers may be more health-conscious, while others may not. In recent years, employers have not only encouraged, but also paid for gym memberships and other forms of exercise, including health technology and standing desks. The combination of flexibility, remote workplaces and the new emphasis placed on workers’ health demonstrate the new trend of employers attempting to find the right work-life balance with each of its employees.

## **II. Communication in the Beginning, Middle, and After**

### **Every Worker Should Have a Plan**

More and more individuals in a workplace want and need a plan and goals in a position in order to be successful. Millennials focus on reviews and status meetings in order to know what to do, ensure the current work is satisfactory, and any improvements to his or her work. However, although these meetings and reviews sound productive, these review meetings can be seen as redundant and a waste of productive time of senior employees who have to give and prepare for these meetings. These frequent review meetings also feed into the millennial stereotype of a need for praise or purpose. A solution to satisfy all could be casual or informal review meetings to ensure the quality of work while allowing senior employees to give honest and productive feedback. This could also allow for an increase in work productivity and quality of work performed by newer employees. Workplaces should also ensure goals, expectations, and requirements are clear and well-communicated to all employees. When communication breaks down, the quality of work and communication breaks down.

### **Training The Next Generation**

In some workplaces, notably in legal and claims specialist positions, there is a tendency of a lack of training in new employees. Many new employees, when hired, are thrown into the figurative “fire” and are expected to perform up to standards they may not know. Most positions may not have the opportunity to have a training period after hiring, but a brief training period may be more beneficial than an employee learning while on the job. Employees could learn how to handle situations and issues without having to ask for help, taking away valuable time from other employees, or losing confidence in his or her ability to perform a particular role or job. The view on training could be seen more as “short term pain for long term gain.” However, other positions may not allow for on-the-job training in which may not be able to have beneficial on-the-job training.

### **III. Keeping Up With the Technology**

#### **Improvements and Having the “Latest and Greatest” in a Workplace**

Bigger employers, particularly larger law firms, can create barriers to accepting changes in technology, a field everyone recognizes is perpetually evolving. Many large employers tend to avoid large scale technology changes due to cost and time. The latest technology offers more utility for large businesses, however, the advances in technology come at a great cost. Large employers provide technology to the requisite employees, which comes at a high direct cost to the business. Further, the upgraded technology can take away productive time from employees who require training to learn and understand the upgrades. Larger employers ease this tough transition by including some of those who may be more technologically-challenged in the decision-making process and explaining the benefits of the technology upgrades. Employers can also offer training sessions by those competent with this technology to teach and educate those who may not necessarily understand the function of the new technology. Another barrier exists in those who make the decisions for larger employers. At larger workplaces, the individual or individuals who are making the business decisions are often considered Boomers or are of an equivalent age. Such individuals may be out of touch with what is needed in order to create a flexible and more efficient workplace. One suggestion to combat this issue could be to have committees and subcommittees in the workplace in order to provide feedback as to the current state of technology; whether the required technology could be improved; and if so, what if any viable and cost-effective solutions exist that can be utilized. For maximum effectiveness, the committees should be comprised of individuals from a variety of generations to provide valuable input on the needs faced by the different generations in the workplace. On the other side of the coin, simple interfaces must be utilized to maximize efficiency and communication among individuals who range in age and technological competence. Technology is not only a great asset for a workplace, but also provides flexibility to the workplace and its workers.

Advances in technology allow employees to be more flexible in answering urgent questions via email from mobile phones or laptops. An individual does not have to be “in the office” or at a desk in order to provide quick and efficient answers to client and claim’s questions. Proper safety precautions must be taken, however, and a competent and effective IT department or other safety programs can provide the required protection of not only the business’ assets, but also the personal information of employees and clients. Technology enables a connectedness to the workplace at all hours of the day. While the ever-present workplace can be seen as a negative to some, the younger generations often view this connectedness as a benefit which provides them additional flexibility and efficiency leading to a more adjusted work-life integration. Individuals, young and old, can enjoy his or her time away from the office and have the peace of mind that nothing urgent in the office is occurring and if needed, technology facilitates communication with the office to address pressing issues. Although evolving technology may be intimidating to some, in today’s day and age it provides flexibility, utility, and efficiency to a workplace. Individuals, both young and old, can appreciate the advantages of technology that is implemented and utilized correctly and productively in a workplace.

#### **IV. Dress Code and Relationship Dynamics in the Workplace**

##### **New Age Dress Code Policies**

More and more employers are trending in the direction to allow employees to wear casual dress while in the office and not meeting with clients. A new term, "smart casual," is used to describe this new philosophy. The term combines casual and business attire and takes into account each individual's daily schedule and the employer's goal and philosophy in its interactions with clients and colleagues. The difference in styles comes from a change in view from a more traditional dress to a more relaxed and functional view. Several considerations can be taken into account when determining a workplace dress code. Such considerations include but are not limited to location, workplace culture, and outside perception. These factors, however, can be considered by individuals who are looking to join your business. Time and money spent by employees on business professional clothing and attire can be spent in other enjoyable ways. Overall, the workplace might be able to function more collectively as a unit when operating in a more relaxed fashion. Of course, businesses must determine for themselves its culture and its perception by clients and others in the industry.

##### **What's Your Culture?**

Every workplace has a culture. A workplace culture can be described in only a few words and describes a workplace's values and priorities. For example, a law firm's culture can focus on hard work and hours, where another law firm's culture can be more family oriented and focused on work-life balance. All workplaces must strive to be relatable with clients, colleagues, and others. Relationships must be maintained and nurtured in order to be effective in the law and in claims specialization. An unfortunate recent trend occurred between defense firms and claims specialists. In years past, fraternization between defense counsel and insurance carriers were encouraged. Currently, however, such fraternization is not encouraged outside of networking groups such as CLM. The limited interactions between counsel and claims specialist force such exchanges to be essential to present and communicate both yours and your company's workplace culture and ideals. A workplace's internal culture impacts the outside perception and attractiveness of working for a particular company or business.

#### **V. Recruiting the Next Generation and Retaining Individuals**

Corporate culture has a direct effect on a workplace's ability to recruit and retain individuals who desire to work for a particular firm or company compared to other similar businesses in the industry. The corporate culture of a workplace is evident in any interview and hiring process. The interviewee usually attends the interview well-prepared and with several questions regarding the work, workplace, and culture. A new trend in the insurance and legal industries is role reversal in an interview process. Traditionally, the interviewer would ask the bulk of the questions in order to determine the qualifications and ability of the candidate to perform the open job successfully. However, the more current trend is for interviewees to ask an equal amount of questions to find out whether the workplace would be a good workplace for himself or herself in order to satisfy the

interviewees desires in a workplace. Recent studies have found that money and salary are now lower in priority compared to work-life balance and other priorities.

The shift in this dynamic puts the employer in a more difficult position compared to in years past. Workplaces must mold and change their corporate cultures in order to attract competent workers in a competitive and specialized field. The employer must figure out what keeps their employees happy and if there is anything the employer is currently doing that could be improved or changed to attract other employees to the workplace. Corporate culture may be the most important aspect of recruitment and retention. The interview and hiring process promotes and exemplifies a workplace's culture and attractiveness to those in the market for a new job. Fostering innovation in technology and culture can not only serve to attract and retain younger employees, but it can be an effective tool to retain experienced veterans needed to train and mentor the new claims litigation professional. Claims and claims litigation is, at its core, a relationship business which requires both internal and external generational understanding. Developing a culture of intergenerational innovation not only serves to strengthen internal cohesion, but empowers the organization to successfully adapt to external changes. Employers must be cognizant and appreciate its work-life balance, communication, technology, and corporate culture in order to ensure its current and future employees are content with the state of the workplace.