

## **Generation Y and Work/Life Balance**

### What are their expectations?

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#### **Abstract**

This research was performed to better understand work/life balance that Generation Y hopes to achieve as they enter the workplace. Work/life balance is defined as the optimal ratio between time spent at work and time spent away from work. A sample of 267 participants born between the years 1977-1993 completed a questionnaire that addressed different aspects of their current and future expectations of work/life balance. It was found that Generation Y expects to have flexible hours, and is willing to participate in telecommuting. Generally, it was found that Generation Y places a great emphasis on having an ideal work/life balance.

#### **Introduction**

Generation Y is a unique generation, different than any other before. Growing up with modern technology this generation is highly skilled and ðare at ease with communication technologies.ö Myers, K. (2010). Secondly, they strive to succeed and have ða demand for professional development and growth.ö Treuren and Anderson (2010) Lastly, Generation Y has high expectations regarding salary and promotion, they ðwish for reward through income growth and recognition of their contribution.ö Treuren and Anderson (2010). Combining all these factors makes for an exciting new work force. While this Generation Y expects to succeed they also value their flexibility in scheduling to ðbalance play with workö (Myers, 2010). This study attempts to find out what Generation Y's expectations are regarding work/life balance. We hope to better understand what exactly Generation Y's definition of work/life balance, as well as their future expectations of work/life balance moving forward into a career.

#### **Generation Y**

There is no clearly defined time period for Generation Y, also known as the Millennials. The start of Generation Y can range from 1977 ó 1980 depending upon the source (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010; Suleman & Nelson, 2011; Wong, Gardiner, Lang & Coulon, 2008); however, for the purpose of examining a working population, we will define this generation as anyone born between the years 1977 and 1993. We have chosen this range to include a population that should be currently working; therefore, we are examining a blend of people who are relatively new to the workforce, as well as those completing their education and who will be joining the workforce soon.

Managers are continuously being faced with the challenge of integrating newcomers into their organization, Generation Y presents a challenge to these managers who must train and motivate this next generation of employees so that their strengths become a benefit to the company. Understanding new generations as they move into the work force will continue to be

an important adjustment for managers (Meier & Crocker, 2010). Our aim is to identify some of the key expectations Generation Y have for the future, in regards to work/life balance. Therefore, our secondary research question looks at Generations Y's expectations for the future and how they feel work/life balance will affect their careers in the long run.

Although there is limited information on Generation Y's workplace attitudes and preferences, this is the perception that recent research has discovered. According to Treuren and Anderson (2010), Generation Y values:

- \* a demand for professional growth and development
- \* a desire to reconcile their various life interests through work/life balance
- \* a need for variety in work, with challenge and change
- \* a wish for social interaction within the workplace
- \* the desire for responsibility and input
- \* a wish for reward through income growth and recognition of their contribution
- \* a desire for appropriate workplace leadership

By not taking these expectations into consideration during the hiring process, managers may be faced with an unanticipated turnover rate. Studies have shown that public acknowledgment in the work place improves moral and employee satisfaction. By increasing responsibility through decision-making and challenging employees intellectually we can hope to foster a bond between employees and their organizations. However, it has been said Generation Y expects to change jobs often during their lifetime (Morton, 2002; Kim, Knight, & Crutsinger, 2009), especially if they feel their talents are underutilized (Kim et al., 2009; Weingarten, 2009). By challenging Generation Y, employers can better capitalize their abilities and increase organizational productivity.

As Generation Y enters into the workforce it is important for managers to consider how generational differences will affect retention rates within their organization. For the purpose of this study, we have defined work/life balance as the perceived optimal ratio between the time spent working and time spent away from their work. According to Cennamo and Gardner (2008), "there has been little opportunity to study their [Generation Y] work values but anecdotal information characterizes Generation Y as valuing work/life balance, life styles, career development and overseas travel more than other generations."

### **Work/Life Balance**

As previously defined, work/life balance is the ratio or difference that people perceive to be optimal between time spent working and time spent away from their work. According to Myers (2010), a recent Gallup poll found that Millennials desire a work/life balance that will allow them to balance play with work. Giving Generation Y flexibility within their schedules would allow them to pursue the activities they enjoy outside of the work place while maintaining a high level of productivity. According to Westerman and Yamamura (2007), Generation Y appears to want a work/life balance that offers flexibility in defining who they are within their job. Generation Y presents a challenge to managers who must train and motivate them in order to ensure their strengths become a benefit to the company. It is evident that a greater emphasis will be placed on work/life balance in the coming years as Generation Y aspires for a work/life

balance (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Zemke et al., 2000) to achieve professional satisfaction and personal freedom (Sayers, 2007). Our primary research question aims to define what work life balance means to Generation Y.

Overall, we feel that there is very little data that analyzes Generation Y and work/life balance. We feel that by seeking answers to our research questions we will be better able to understand what work/life balance means to Generation Y and what they expect as they move forward in their careers.

## **Methodology**

### *Participants*

A total of 290 male and female participants from Generation Y, with birthdates ranging from 1977 to 1993, were recruited in this completely anonymous study over a two week period. Of the 290 people that participated only 267 questionnaires were fully completed and could be taken into account for our data. Out of the 267 participants 65% were female and 35% were male. A further breakdown for each gender can be seen in figure 1.1. Participants were identified through personal contacts of the conductors of the study, which was voluntary, with no incentive given to the participants to complete the questionnaire. Data were collected by means of a web-based questionnaire called Lime-survey that would take the participants approximately 15 minutes to complete. Following an ethical approval page before the questionnaire began there were twenty questions based on work/life balance.

*Figure 1.1 Age/Gender Breakdown*

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
Under 20	4.5%	8.6%
21-25	44.3%	62.4%
26-30	32.2%	22.6%
31-34	19%	6.4%

### *Measures*

During our research period we found very few studies that were conducted solely on work/life balance so we looked at research that included aspects of work/life balance. As well we took into account our [conductors of the study] opinions of what we thought created good work/life balance. From this vantage point we were able to determine things that were important factors in work/life balance such as overtime, mental stress, telecommuting, and flexible hours. From there we formulated questions that could be answered using an array of different scales. We chose the likert scale for fourteen of the questions because they allowed the participant to choose varying degrees of how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement or question. For the questions in Figures 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5 the likert scale we chose when setting up the online questionnaire did not export data from two particular data points on the scale. This means that we did not get sufficient quality data from these answers because almost half of the participants chose an answer that did not record data. We also had five multiple choice questions, two of which captured the age and gender demographic. The other three multiple choice questions were to probe concerns for workload, and vacation and overtime expectations. We also used one open ended question to solicit the measuring of work/life balance to Generation Y in their own words

to identify what individual factors they deemed to be important. To calculate the data we used the means as well as standard deviation. The breakdown was done by gender as well as overall.

## Results

*Figure 1.2 Work to Live*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Female Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Male Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Overall Mean (Std Dev)</b>
How strongly do you identify with this statement: I work to live	1.3 (1.2)	1.4 (1.2)	1.3 (1.2)
Scale 0 = No Answer, 1 =Do Not Identify, 2 =Neutral, 3 = Strongly Identify			

*Figure 1.3 Time for Commitments*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Female Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Male Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Overall Mean (Std Dev)</b>
Are you concerned that you do not spend enough time with family do to work/school commitments	1.0 (1.1)	0.9 (1.0)	1.0 (1.1)
Scale 0 = No Answer, 1 = Not Concerned at All, 2 = Neutral, 3 = Highly Concerned			

*Figure 1.4 Standard Work Week*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Female Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Male Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Overall Mean (Std Dev)</b>
Do you think a standard 40 hour work week is minimal or too much	1.3 (0.9)	1.4 (0.9)	1.3 (0.9)
Scale 0 = No Answer, 1 = Too Much, 2 = Neutral, 3 = Not Enough			

*Figure 1.5 Worry for Commitments*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Female Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Male Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Overall Mean (Std Dev)</b>
How often do you think or worry about work / school when you are not actually there?	3.4 (0.6)	3.3 (0.9)	3.4 (0.8)
Scale 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always			

*Figure 1.6 Overtime Expectations*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Female Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Male Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Overall Mean (Std Dev)</b>
When you enter a full time job, how much overtime do you expect to put in per week beyond the standard 40 hours?	2.3 (0.9)	2.8 (1.3)	2.4 (1.1)
Scale 1 = None, 2 = 0-5 Hours, 3 = 6-10 Hours, 4 = 11-15 Hours, 5 = 16-20 Hours, 6 = 20+Hours			

*Figure 1.7 Vacation Expectations*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Female Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Male Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Overall Mean (Std Dev)</b>
How many weeks of vacation do you plan to start with?	2.3 (0.6)	2.2 (.6)	2.2 (0.6)
Scale 1 = None, 2 = 1-2 Weeks, 3 = 3-4 Weeks, 4 = 5Weeks			

*Figure 1.8 Work/life Balance*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Female Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Male Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Overall Mean (Std Dev)</b>
I expect to have a similar balance of work/life and social life as my parents	3.9 (1.7)	4.0 (1.7)	3.9 (1.6)
When planning my future I factor in the amount of time I am going to work in the field or fields I am pursuing	5.1 (1.4)	5.1 (1.5)	4.9 (1.6)
Time off is more important to me than overtime	5.5 (1.4)	5.1 (1.6)	5.4 (1.5)
I highly value a position that offers flexible hours	6.1 (1.2)	5.8 (1.2)	6.0 (1.2)
I am intrinsically motivated by work regardless of pay and time off/vacation	4.2 (1.6)	4.4 (1.8)	4.3 (1.7)
The number of weeks of vacation time impacts my decision to accept a job offer	4.1 (1.6)	4.0 (1.7)	4.1 (1.7)
I would enjoy working a compressed work week (for example working 10 hour days and then having 3 off)	5.1 (1.8)	5.3 (1.6)	5.1 (1.7)
I would rather overtime than have time off	2.4 (1.3)	3.0 (1.7)	2.6 (1.5)
I would accept a promotion with higher pay even if it means working longer hours	4.6 (1.5)	5.2 (1.2)	4.8 (1.4)

Question	Female Mean (Std Dev)	Male Mean (Std Dev)	Overall Mean (Std Dev)
I would enjoy working from home	5.1 (1.9)	4.7 (1.8)	5.0 (1.8)
I feel like I am generally able to balance life and work/school commitments	5.0 (1.3)	5.5 (1.2)	5.2 (1.2)
Scale 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Disagree 4 = Neither Agree or Disagree, 5 = Somewhat Agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly Agree			

One of our last questions on the questionnaire was an open ended question: What does work/life balance mean to you? We received an array of answers but some of the most common trends were having time to keep up a healthy lifestyle, time for family, happiness, and less stress. Some of the responses that best represent the majority were:

• I can be equally productive and present at both my roles of work and home

• Having a balance between time spent at work and time spent with friends and family

• A life in which work does not overshadow life, work to live not live to work

• Being able to get everything done and being successful, while still having a satisfying life outside of work/school

• Work/life balance is VERY important. It means that you are able to balance your work and your social/family life equally or in a way that makes you happy

• Being able to get work done but able to spend time with family and not having to worry about the job

## Discussion

### *What does work life balance mean to Generation Y?*

When we presented an open-ended short answer question in our questionnaire asking the participants to define their idea of what work/life balance is, we received many of the same responses. Many people believed that work/life balance is the separation of time spent at work compared to the time they spend with family and their social life while placing an importance on trying to achieve an equal balance or a balance that made them happy. Many respondents thought about work/life balance in terms of being with their family and being just as productive away from work as a spouse or parent as they were at work, confirming the family oriented view of Generation Y we read about in the literature researched. Maintaining relationships away from work and not having to worry about work away from the workplace is also important to Generation Y.

### *What are Generations Y's expectations for the future?*

Generation Y's expectations for their future involve flexible work hours for family, maintaining relationships and their health. Many people enjoy going to the gym, but sometimes with long work days, insufficient break time along with commitments after work it could be very hard to fit the gym into a person's day. Generation Y also would highly value the opportunity to

work from home if it is suitable to their occupation in order to achieve the balance they want. This is becoming increasingly more popular as interconnectedness continues to increase in the workplace, and being present isn't always needed. Generation Y is very technologically savvy and the majority of participants in our questionnaire would enjoy working from home.

As seen in figure 1.6 a majority of the respondents said that they only expected 0-5 hours of overtime per week beyond the standard 40-hour workweek and the next largest group expected 6-10 hours. When asked how many weeks of vacation do you expect to start with (figure 1.7) over half of the respondents understood that they would start with an average of 1-2 weeks vacation. This shows a down to earth view of what potential [Generation Y] employees expect in terms of time off when beginning new employment, but doesn't necessarily prove the amount of vacation time Generation Y prefers or values as they progress in their careers. We asked that when planning your future, do you factor in the amount of time you would be in the field you are working or pursuing (Figure 1.8) and found that a large majority of the participants agreed on some level. This is evidence that many of the members of Generation Y do have a preference for a strongly perceived work/life balance, which may be even more important to them than being intrinsically motivated at work. The only thing that may motivate Generation Y more than work/life balance may be money. We asked two similar questions, time off is more important to me than overtime (Figure 1.8) and I would rather overtime than have time off (Figure 1.8) to see if the results would vary. It was found that in both cases the majority agreed on some level that it was more important to have time off instead of overtime. As well, when asked if they would accept a promotion with higher pay even if it meant working longer hours (Figure 1.8) over half of the participants said they would take the position. Both of these findings that are based on extrinsically motivating factors and are strong findings in regards to Generation Y's preferences than their need for intrinsically motivating work. Interestingly enough when asked if they were intrinsically motivated by work regardless of pay and time off/vacation (Figure 1.8) we found that it was a split down the middle, have just over half agreeing on some level and the other half being indifferent or disagreeing. This may be a reflection of Generation Y or preferences of people in general. One needs money in order to sustain themselves and their family, and if their means of getting that money is not enjoyable to them than that person would obviously value their time away from work more.

#### *How does Generation Y feel work life balance will affect their careers in the long run?*

Generation Y is concerned with how much time they will have to maintain relationships with family and friends without interference from their jobs or workplace. They want flexibility in order to not miss out on things they deem important. They generally do not plan on working too many hours of overtime, as seen by the question that asked how strongly they relate to the idea of I live to work, in which very few respondents identified with the statement. However, there will always be the discrepancy of people who strive for excellence in their job and are very career oriented personalities.

As stated earlier, interconnectedness away from work is becoming more and more of a reality in many fields of work. Over the past ten years the use of cell phones, smart phones, teleconferencing, online video communication, and even email are new revelations or things that have become increasingly more popular over time. This makes it increasingly difficult in many fields to not bring work home with them, or to voluntarily avoid calls from work. An

emerging trend in the sales and service sector is that if you do not make yourself available at all times, customers will find their business elsewhere. As seen in Figure 1.5 a majority of our participants said either sometimes or often they think about work/school when they are not physically there. This tells us that many people are taking a mental load with them. This could cause people to worry about and be distracted when at home or with family and could impact the quality of work employees produce; however, this may be the double-edged sword that comes with a more flexible work schedule, and is the main reason in which many people are being granted the ability to work from home in industries in which it would never have been acceptable for prior generations.

### *Limitations to the Study*

After conducting our study we found many limitations and changes we would have made if we were to conduct the study again. First, we should have segmented our sample population between the working and those that were not currently working, as well as identified what sector they were working in. Different sectors of work have drastically different expectations of work/life balance as what normally pertains to the expectations of working hours in a particular position. For example, work/life balance is different between sectors that are unionized, seasonal, white-collar, and people who have not yet entered the workforce. Also, the participants of this questionnaire were mostly focused in a few regions, between Guelph, Ontario and Mississauga, Ontario, with a large majority coming from University of Guelph Students. Even though our population represents our target population of the study, it mostly represents an educated population, which may not represent the same value and beliefs that are consistent throughout Canada. Finally, there was a mistake in our questionnaire in wording when we were attempting to properly segment our target population. We omitted the age of twenty from the questionnaire which may have slightly skewed the responses for the age demographic.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the information obtained from this study has may be used in several ways. It can be used by employers to better structure their organization in terms of hours of operation and flexible working arrangements. According to Generation Y, Working from home generated a 29% strongly agree response rate and 18% agree. Telecommuting may be a viable option for employers to implement in order to satisfy the incoming labour force. Of the respondents, 34% indicated that they are able to balance life and work/school commitments. This may indicate that Generation Y places different emphasis on priorities, it is important for them to maintain a social life outside of work. Employers can use this information to implement retention strategies that are associated with employees having enough personal time. For example, flex hours could possibly increase in the future, this way employees are able to work condensed work weeks in order to maintain their personal needs. Respondents indicated that they are able to balance their commitments may also indicate to employers that multi tasking is a strength that the incoming labour force will bring to the organization. Overall employers need to be aware that changes are imminent and in order to maximize the productivity of Generation Y.

Further areas of study would be to segregate fields of employment to find trends within industries. Also, to set up a longitudinal study to measure actual feelings and behaviours as generation Y progresses into the work force. At the moment most of the responses are based on



perceptions of entering the work force, it will be interesting to see what happens as Generation Y progresses deeper into the workforce and is forced to actually balance work and life.

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