

# *The New Normal* A Guide To Achieving Work/Life Balance

*Co-Authors*

*Lani Carrow and Helen Rosenfeld*





## Background

*Work/Life Connection is a company founded by Lani Carrow and Helen Rosenfeld. They came together to address the gap between employer "Work" expectations and employee "Life" demands.*

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### INTRODUCTION

*What's new? What's normal? Especially: What's new and normal in the workplace? Obviously, the normal of former generations have shifted and we are challenged daily with what is still relevant. So, then "what'sssss up?" Yes, something new IS happening and it is now our new normal.*

*Throughout our careers, we have been involved in helping adults cope with the work environment and make it work for them. We have seen first hand and have also been participants in the emergence of women in executive levels of leadership. We've also experienced the growing numbers of women working full time, either as heads of single-parent families or as necessary agents in two-income households.*

*The higher and higher levels of job-related stress*

*and the demands for increased productivity have begun to take a toll on workers overburdened with family-related responsibilities and long commutes. The “child” of WWII-generation parents is now caught in the middle, between parenting both an elderly parent and children who now may be young adults. In addition, this group, referred to in the media as the aging baby boomers, faces an undeniable personal stress-producer: facing the reality of turning 50! Or even 60!*

*Younger people who are in the early stages of their careers are entering a work world vastly different from that of their parents or even of their older siblings. In some ways, it is easier for them to adapt. There are no “good old days” in their experience for them to look back on fondly. But the past always looks rosier through the rearview mirror. The work world of today is an exciting, challenging, roller-coaster ride. For those who can balance family/personal responsibilities against the stimulating, test-your-mettle-everyday environment at work, the opportunity for success is limitless.*

*These conditions and others which we describe in the following chapters, interplay to create what we call “The New Normal”, a growing feeling of wanting more balance, more personal time, more flexibility, more choice and in the wake of recent terrorist strikes, more security. The sooner we acknowledge our New Normal, the better. Even though the New Normal affects the generations differently, this factor in itself is the connection to its ever-changing nature. It is vital for us, for our employers and for our families to generate a dialogue in order to understand (and then to assume) roles as New Normal partners.*

*Our book covers the many facets of the New Normal perspective to help you to understand and then to deal with your New Normal lifestyle whether you are starting out, in the middle of, or looking to ease out of your current work life. Through discussing New Normal stressors, we hope you will learn tips on staying emotionally and physically healthy, get ideas on re-creating a results-oriented workplace and ultimately to craft the awareness to satisfy the quality of life that we all desire. This book is a must-read for individuals and company representatives, alike. We hope you enjoy it and that you will pass it on.*



## Chapter One

*“What Color is Your  
Paradigm Shift?”*



*The employees: More women, more people of color, more older workers, more non-English speaking people, more people who are physically challenged, more welfare to work.*

*The employers: More competition, more involvement, routinely, with companies in different time zones, more information available than anyone can reasonably cope with, more challenges to keep productivity and profits high, more production done in countries not the USA, more need to become aware of threats to our safety.*

**The challenge:** How to utilize employees' strengths to maximum benefit for employers' sustained viability and growth potential, as an employer of choice. This chapter celebrates the diversity of our everyday life and looks at how we can embrace our differences and share our similarities whether they are ethnic, cultural, regional, or generational. As the economic homogenization of our global village grows daily, all cultures will simultaneously seek to recall their roots and to idealize their backgrounds proudly, in order to continue to go forward.



## **How are we becoming more productive?**

No single organization or individual within an organization can do it alone. Partnerships between companies and teams within organizations have become common practice. However, not all partnerships are mutually beneficial and not all teams are smooth running. Egos still run high, tempers still flare and differences create dis-

cord when they can be the bridge that spans the divide and generates the best result. In the *New Normal* the money is on the value of breadth, inclusion, open-mindedness and creativity.

## **The best teams are diverse.**



In our work as organization development specialists, we have often recommended and used the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) in team building sessions. This easy-to-score self assessment allows individuals to ascertain their personal communication and leadership style. What has become apparent is that the same “type” team members may come to quicker conclusions, but rarely do they have the best solutions. Differing opinions and perspectives among team members may cause the process to take longer, however the end products of diverse teams are inevitably of higher quality. Diverse teams need to develop patience to hear one another out and open-mindedness to consider how another’s approach to the issue might have validity. We don’t need to change who we are to appreciate diversity, we just need to change how we see each other.

## **Diversity brings more to the table, literally!**



One of our training programs involved the follow-up to a diversity competency initiative.

To carry the theme further, we proposed that the organization create an internal cookbook containing recipes from employees, which represented their personal cultural heritage. In a

few weeks, we had enough recipes to fill a 100-page book. In doing this, we accentuated the wide variety of backgrounds that employees on all levels had to offer. Everyone participated with little or no nudging and we received cards and letters from staff about how this activity made them contact relatives about recipes that would have been lost forever. We went even further and suggested that the cafeteria produce menus from the book's recipes during cultural heritage months. Many employees tried foods prepared in ways that they would otherwise have not tasted.



## **Help children to discover their own and other cultures sooner.**

Do you share stories from your childhood with your children?

From your grandparents and their grandparents? Do you teach your children even a few words of your native language or of your religious heritage. In interfaith or interracial marriages, it is even more valuable to open children's eyes to their heritage on all fronts. There are many ways to bring cultural awareness into your children's, and your own, lives. There are many specialty museums located in most of our main cities. Make a special effort to encourage your child's school to offer culturally diverse programs that extend across all cultures, including your own. A simple classroom exercise is having each child share a story or something about his/or her heritage. The teacher can have them pin point the countries on the world map and encourage a geography lesson in the process. Fine art and the performing arts are also ways to recognize di-

versity. The earlier we learn to respect our differences and appreciate our similarities, the easier will be the transition to a multi-cultural workplace or educational setting.

## **Embrace Similarities/Share Differences.**



The “Diversity Wheel” is an effective exercise that can be use with work groups or in classrooms. It is easy to facilitate and doesn’t require expensive materials. During this exercise, participants are placed into small groups and each group is asked to consider five things about the individuals in the group that are similar. After that portion of the exercise, the same individuals then have to tell their group how they feel different from the others. As the small groups share their perspectives, individuals often relate that they are “turned on” by the comfort of similarity (many admitted that at first they saw none). In the same regard, the awareness of their individual differences, especially those of which they were most proud, was found to build self-esteem.

## **Economic Homogenization.**



OK. We appear to desire to live in a global village and if you travel the world, it really seems as if there is the same fast food, brand-name clothiers, ATMS/banks etc. in ALL corners of the world. As a matter of fact, on a recent trip, friends related that they were disappointed to see so much of the USA in Europe. They visited Europe for its quaint village

shops and charming local restaurants, so seeing fast food franchises was a definite turnoff. However, the franchises seem to be getting the message and redecorating to fit into the native culture – good show. Along these lines, many more local and worldwide tourist destinations are quickly readopting their unique selves and are revitalizing what is natural to their surroundings and shunning the former, less authentic facades. Those who succeed, are reaping increasing monetary benefits as well as getting to relearn what was becoming lost cultures (and languages) in many areas, even among the Native American Mohawk nation.



### **Be Fearless in the Finding.**

Visit nearby country fairs (if you live in the city) or downtown bazaars (if you are from the suburbs) and take any opportunity to experience multi-cultural events.

Listen to your local public radio station and hear about subjects that you might never consider of interest, until you find yourself saying, “really, I never knew that..” a few times. In doing so, you will open your mind to options other than what the local TV news has to offer. Creativity comes through diversity, and we can all use a more creative mind to deal with life on a daily basis.



### **Become More Aware.**

No matter how culturally diverse we hope to become, we must add a new sense of awareness to our normal quest. This requirement has had more impact in our recent past, now that we know that our country’s security is less secure. We now understand the

importance of keeping our eyes and ears open to unusual individuals, situations or comments. We cannot ignore gut feelings, naively assuming that we live in a safe democracy. Our country has stated enemies, and many of them may live and work in our communities. As we balance our desire for cultural diversity, we must also balance a renewed sense of vigilance, patriotism and caution, minus the old stereotype approaches. This can be achieved by rethinking our work site procedures and personnel changes. Work teams can assist one another in creating a safer workplace, as well as allowing the increased use of flextime, so that employees are spread across wider bands, and work is staged accordingly.