

## SUMMARY

## Worklife balance

## Work/Life balance

The life of a white collar worker used to be clear and simple. He made sure he turned up for work on time, did what he had to do until 5 p.m. and then went home again for his evening meal with his wife and children. Nowadays, developments such as the 24-hour economy, performance incentives and the ICT revolution mean that a white collar worker at whatever multinational you care to mention is no longer tied to office buildings and hours: he/she can do his/her work in the middle of the night, so to speak – as long as it's done on time. And worldwide communication with counterparts overseas can mean that working hours start long before 9 a.m. and go on to well after 5 p.m. Which in turn puts pressure on staff's work/life balance. Fortunately, Shell offers three courses which can help, and Interview put a number of propositions to their coaches Rob Veersma and Elise van Doorne.

If someone's work/life balance is lost, that's his/her problem, not the employer's. Elise: Basically, your work/life balance is your personal responsibility. In other words, if you think that balance has been lost, you have to raise the matter yourself. But it's too easy and short-sighted to say the employer can look the other way. Rob (in agreement): On the one hand, your work/life balance is a private matter, but on the other hand the employer must ensure that every employee can organize his work in a manageable way. We've recently introduced a course which doesn't focus on heightened awareness of work/life balance problems, but on how to clear your desk by five o'clock.

If you opt for a career, you have to accept that your work/life balance will tip over towards "work-work-work". Rob: Yes, I think you do. If you opt for a career, you're expected to commit yourself. It's one of the tacit norms, although quite a few people deny they exist. Elise: I don't agree with this proposition. You don't have to accept everything. But I do notice that young people put up with more: I think their values have gradually shifted. Course attendees tell me they raise their eyebrows when their neighbours get home by 6.30 p.m.!

The whole work/life balance business = women's moaning! Elise: No! Women tend to raise work/life balance problems earlier than men. Why? Because they are confronted by them earlier and so are forced to think about them. How can I combine this with that? And will I still have time for ...? Traditionally, men used to be less "bothered" by such questions. Rob: A major cause of a skewed balance is social control. People work longer hours because "everyone does so", or stay on longer because it "makes a better impression". As a result they don't get round to doing certain things outside work, or run out of time. And, as Elise says, women are affected earlier and more frequently.

How can you ensure a good work/life balance? By simply saying no more often. Rob: Yes, I agree. It's called laying down your limits. But it's not easy to "simply" say no. Elise (nods): I reckon it would be true if you left out the word "simply". Because saying no is difficult. Before you can do this, you have to think deeply about what your own norms and values are. What do I want to achieve? Only then can you then say no properly. Otherwise you turn down requests haphazardly, which could put your career at risk, for example. So it's a question of making choices, of defending certain choices and accepting the consequences.

