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The manager-coach's roles and skills as needed to optimise the work-life balance of working women.

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Interview 7

Date: 9/9/2011

Respondent: working woman

Level: administrator

Interviewer welcomes the respondent and explains the process

Question 1

Alright, so we started off and I gave you a brief overview of what work-life balance is, if you think of that term and then you think of work-life integration, do you think they are the same thing or different.

If you could just explain the integration part of it for me?

Integration is where things are blended together, integration is where your work and your life are sort of combined, whereas work-life balance are kind of balanced on a scale, so do you think they are saying the same thing or are very different things?

They are very different things, your work-life and your home life - sometimes you find that you spend most of your time at work during the week. And in my case, I always arrive home at past 5 or 6 and then I only have a few hours with my family, so it is not balanced as such because I spend less time during the week with my family because most of my time is spent at work until late, then doing homework and checking their books and then by 8 o' clock, they are tired and they want to go to bed.

Question 2

So looking at that then, what does work-life balance mean to you?

I think it means that balancing your work and the life you spend with your family – work-life – being at work and being with your family more or less at the same time, but unfortunately it doesn't balance.

Question 3

In what way is work-life balance important to you and why?

It is very important because you really need time with your family and you spend most of your time at work. So to make it balance, it is very difficult because the place where I live and coming to work with the transport system also plays a role in not balancing my work-life. I mean, I leave work at half past 4 and because of transport constraints, I sometimes only get home at 6. Then with my kids and myself we must leave by 6 o' clock in the morning to be at work by 8 o' clock, so the problem is the transport, if maybe the transport system can improve, I think it would be better.

Even my husband with the job that he is doing, he starts work at like 3am and I am left with the kids, then maybe if he could get something different or to change his work times, then I think things would work better.

So if he changed his times and if the transport was better, you would have a better work-life balance.

What time is he home by?

12 o' clock but you know men. He is helpful but sometimes he is tired and just wants to go to bed, so he will sleep until 4pm, but there is a good and bad side of it. The one good thing is he will cook if he isn't feeling lazy. Then my kids are used to me

helping them with their homework. Even though he is there earlier than me, so I am still the one who has to make sure that all that stuff is done.

Okay, so you sit with the responsibility of the home but you are still working a full day.

Yes and I am up from 4am – 4am I am awake already, just to make sure their lunch boxes are packed and their books are packed and neat in their bags, and making their beds.

Are you responsible for cleaning the house as well?

Yes but my husband does help me, but on Sundays, I like to go to church and that is when my husband will help me with the cleaning.

Question 4

Okay, so based on that then, describe your current levels of work-life balance, so at the moment do you have a balance?

As I said, it is not balancing with the transport system and the shifts my husband is working. Then with the kids, even if my husband is there and available the kids are still depending on me, so at times my husband gets upset, because he feels they just want to share everything with me. Yesterday, they wanted a T Shirt for school for Wednesday and I had to go to the shop and look for a T shirt and my husband knows that it is my department and I need to do it, so that night I only got home at half past 7, so it really is not balancing. My work is more balancing than to be with my family.

So, this you have probably already told me but - do you experience any challenges in achieving work-life balance - and you have said that it is not balanced. What are those challenges that you experience, is there anything you want to add to that?

I think I have covered everything

I will leave some space if more comes…

Question 7

To what extent do you think that work-life balance is achievable for you?

It is not easy to explain this whole transport thing but you know for me to achieve maybe part of it, I am looking to get myself my own car, because we only have one car and my husband is taking the car, so that would help. Then to get someone to help me in the house, a helper but then getting a car is the most important. If I can get that, then at least some of the stuff will be achieved. I don't have to be stuck in traffic or standing in long queues forever waiting for a taxi and I will be at home on time, just to see to them and prepare their supper on time, let them eat now, then they have to run a bath and go to bed. Then I would be able to be at work early like everybody who starts at 7 and then goes home at 4, if I could even leave at half past 4, then at least 5 o' clock I am home, so that hour would make a very big difference in my life.

Question 8

Okay good, so say you got to that point and you got your own car and maybe a helper at home and you achieve a level of work-life balance, what would it look like or feel like?

I would really be very happy, more especially just to see myself spending more time with my family. I mean, I need that time for family life, my work-life is not fair on my kids, you know walking into the home as a mother, they are so excited, they want to share their daily experiences, and it is not fair that you have to say 'no, go take a bath' and have you done your homework? So I feel that it is not right, you must have time to let them sit there and talk to you and let them tell you what is happening at school. Then, for my husband to sit with me and to share our experiences from work. But everyday, I walk in and check if he tried to maybe make some rice, even if it is not his responsibility.

Okay, so you would be more happy, you would have more time to spend with your family, when you get home you would be able to talk and not shout, talk to your husband and kids and share experiences, anything else you would like to add to that?

Yes, to have that quality time - that is just not happening easily, I mean Saturdays we are at the church the whole day, then Sundays my kids go for music school lessons and then they come back at 12 - from 2, then they are with the church, then from 3 to 5 I am at music, I am practising with my group, and then we come back home and there is no time. So if that could change with a helper, we would add ample quality time together and I would have time to see them and be able to read them a bed time story or listen to them reading to me as it used to be; with those changes, I am sure a lot would be able to happen and we would be able to spend enough time together as a family. Sundays, we always used to go out for breakfast but now as things go by, it is getting even more hectic, in the morning I must wake up and do the washing, check the school uniforms.

The working woman's realities in attempting to achieve work-life balance

Question 9

Okay, as a working woman, what are your realities? You have told me about some of them but tell me a bit more… you have the transport, you get home, your husband works different hours to you but you take full responsibility for the home, thinking about that then the realities you maybe face in the workplace - as a working woman, are there any realities that you face?

Yes, there are realities at work as a woman -having to work with all these people now in our company, different characters and also coming from home tired, then at work the reality is you have to show this tough face, that you are there and you must deliver no matter what kind of situation you are coming from at home, you have to deliver at work. So you have work, no matter, if someone comes in and says please help me you can't say 'no, my kids are waiting for me at home' and this is also a challenge I am facing. So, you have to sit and work as late as you can because you have to try and make things happen for your client.

Then, also ensuring you always have a smile, even if you didn't have a good day at home, but being in the workplace, so that is always what I say to my friends at work, I know I have days where I feel I don't want to come to work but when I get here I must smile, and when I get to my house I can put on that face again, but at work I must show that I am always happy and I am always smiling.

Is that easy to do or hard to do?

For me it is easy, it is something that I have taught myself, that no matter what, no matter how I feel, I mustn't take it to my workplace, it has nothing to do with them, so it is something very easy for me.

Any other realities?

You know let's say in this industry, you would find that people used to do certain things that were not black people. So they are not expecting black people to be talking to them and understanding these products, so those are realities, so making people understand you, see that they can believe you and whatever information you are giving to them. So, you are facing a challenge there but then convincing them that I am the right person and they can trust me with whatever information that I can provide what they need, takes time.

Very interesting, keep that thought, but with that feeling - is it being black or is it being a black woman?

I think being a black woman.

Okay sorry so you were going to say?

As I say, I go to church and we usually have this quality time as a family. Sometimes we miss that quality time where we spend time talking about the bible and sharing the scriptures with the kids, I mean, because of the challenges we are facing.

Any other challenges or realities that you want to mention?

Like getting my husband to understand that I know he is the man of the house, but sometimes he feels that I take advantage of him, but I am telling you at times, as a woman, you can feel that you are tired and when you get home you just want to get into bed but unfortunately, it is something that is not happening and is not going to happen. No matter how sick or tired I can be, but for him it is so easy, he just walks in and says 'today, I just got home and took a bath and got into bed', then he didn't help the kids with their homework or whatever, that's another challenge as women that we are facing. Then I also can't disturb him and ask him if he cooked, so if I

can’t do something, I have to do what I have to do, no matter how tired I am or how sick I am, you understand.

Question 10

How do these realities impact on your ability to achieve work-life balance?

Some of them they make me strong and that is when I can see for myself how strong I am or how I handle difficult situations; and to me it is also like a learning curve, how to handle some other situations where you might want to shout or scream about it, but it makes you understand that even if it is like that, you have to do it. I mean, sometimes if I feel I am tired or sick and want to rest and I can’t, but it is the way I was bought up, it is my responsibility as a woman to do that, so you don’t expect your husband to do it, if he doesn’t want to do it then you don’t shout or ask him why he didn’t do it, it is part of your job to do it as a woman. So those things are hard but I think the church I am going to, it is helping me to understand that this is part of the life that we are living and if I shout, it is not going to help. Rather sit with your husband and let him understand these certain challenges in your life, you can’t shout about it and if he can help – good, but if he can’t, just think of another way that it will be easier for you to overcome that situation.

Question 11

What brings you a sense of meaning?

Ooooh eh eh, what gives me meaning! There are many things. Those two boys and my husband. I can say my family, really, and the work that I am doing, I enjoy what I am doing. It is not something that is not so stressful, thankfully.

Anything else that gives you meaning?

Yes, waking up in the morning, you know - just looking at the nature.

Question 12

Lovely, then what gives you fulfilment, what makes you feel fulfilled?

Fulfilment, seeing people acknowledging what I am doing and seeing my kids happy with whatever it is I do for them, no matter how small it is, but that acknowledgement coming from those faces. Being a good mother to them fulfils me a lot as well.

Anything else?

Just closing my eyes and I suppose I could say, life you know. Even my grandparents, I mean being bought up by your grandparents and seeing which way your life goes, because it is interesting, even though your mother was still a young girl when you were born, but having those grandparents who bought me up the way they bought me up, and thinking I have got friends with a mother and a father, and I come from a single parent family where my grandmother did most of the work but really, they wanted the best for me and it has been interesting. I mean, I didn't finish my tertiary level but they did their best to bring me and my two sisters up and every time I see them, I have this fulfilment in my life that these two people really did care about us.

Question 13

Okay, so what support could be provided to you to optimise your levels of work-life balance – to make your work-life balance better, bigger, more - what support could be given to you?

Support like what - my husband? I mean maybe if he could change his working shift, I think that would give me some support because if he is there, some of the stuff we could share amongst ourselves; and the support as well at the workplace, with the people that I am working with, if they could give me like more support on what we are doing.

Tell me a little bit more about that?

Well, if you can find people who don't depend on you so much, I mean there are often people in certain areas who are just dependant on you, they can't find their own support. So if you could rely on the people you are working with, I mean with the three of us, if something is put in the inbox, it doesn't have my name only on it - it is also my duty to do it even if it is not addressed to me, it needs all of us to work together as a team and not to just assign one person to do certain things. I mean, I hear 'I can't do this one as it is too difficult', so if we can find people who can say, no matter how big it is, you need to be able to ask anyone and not just a particular individual. Sometimes you do say to them, 'don't take chances, try it and take it from there, don't be scared' then they say 'this one is not for me, it is for certain individual'. For now it is starting to happen with my manager and the support system is supporting me a lot, but now I think I need that from these other ladies - that it is important to work as a team - then things will change.

Okay and we are going to look at the support your manager provides you through the coffee conversations.

<u>Question 14</u>

What do you think the organisation could do, what is their role in optimising work-life balance? Do they have a role to play, is it their problem?

Yes, they do have a role to play, if they can introduce flexi time, there is but it is not applied to everyone, if we could just choose how we want it, I mean I come in at 8 and others come in at half past 7 and then leave at 4 and I leave at half past, so that is the only way flexi time is working, but I would like them to ask us to suggest how we would like to do it.

Okay so based on that, any other things that the organisation could do that you could think of - so offer a greater degree of flexi time…

Lets say, I would love to come in at 9, I could cook and prepare supper and then when I came home it could just be ready, or they could just give us laptops and ask us to work from home and then we have a particular day when we need to come in and submit our work, I would love to work like that!

The roles and skills of the manager-coach

Question 15

Looking specifically at the role of the manager-coach, what do you think the role of a manager-coach is?

It is to ensure that the work is flowing equally amongst all the employees and having regular meetings with your subordinates to check on them and see where their problems are, and then try to come up with a plan on the problems that they are experiencing.

Okay and anything else?

Yes, having those one-on-one meetings, the coffee conversations and also having someone that you can trust, where you can also share some of your personal or family life issues and she or he will understand more or less what is happening in your life.

Anything else, describing the role of the manager-coach?

It's someone you can trust and share with, who will assist you with things you are lacking, and then someone who you can also feel free with - at any time to go through to his office and just share.

Question 16

Good, what do you think the manager-coach does that helps working woman?

I think one of the points that I have mentioned there is it is all about trusting him, I mean there are some things you can't just share with anyone but if there is coaching, he is going to listen to you and he is going to be able to give you some advice or coach you on how to cope with that situation. Then it improves the productivity.

Why do you feel that it improves your productivity?

Because now the person is working very close with you and he then becomes like a mentor and it is easy for you to communicate with a particular person, and even if you find yourself in a situation where you can't handle what you are doing, it is just easier to be able to go to this person and tell him what your problem is, and you know he will show interest and give you advice on how to take on that particular situation.

Question 17

What do you think your manager-coach could do to assist you?

I think, once a month having those one-on-one meetings - that is definitely helping. And doing my performance review.

Anything else your manager could do to help you?

Also like giving me feedback on my day and the progress of how I am doing my work and where I still need to improve; and then also maybe getting flexi time - if he is there and I can share how it is and he can consider it and tell me what he would require for me to work like that, he could say it would be better for you to come in at that time..

So are these the things that your manager-coach does do to assist you or are these things he could be doing to assist you?

I think these are things he could do to assist me.

Okay and some of them, from what you have said, are in place but others aren't, is that right?

Yes, some are in place, what I also like is he has an open door policy, I can just walk into his office at anytime and he can assist me.

Question 18

What role does your manager-coach play in optimising your work-life balance?

Optimising - just explain that term to me.

Optimising is making it better, so fully enhancing it, so the role your manager-coach plays in trying to get you to have some work-life balance, does he play a role or doesn't he? Or is it a future role?

I think it is more something he could do in the future, because some of the stuff he is not even aware of, so if he can try to make a rule or something, I mean at some point he does help me because when I started everybody was supposed to be at work at half past 7, but I went to his office and said that I can't and I cannot make it before 8 o' clock, my reasons are 1,2,3,4, - so is it okay for me to come in at 8 and he was okay with that.

Okay, so that is what he has done to assist you, but you say some of the other issues - it is more help in the future.

Question 19

So the question for 19 is - what role could your manager-coach play in the future to optimise your work-life balance? So there you have said he knows what the

difficulties are, so maybe you could agree on flexi time, is there anything else you want to add to that?

For now, he has an open office policy and he is very flexible, but for one or two family issues at present I don't feel comfortable sharing, so he does help me when it comes to some of the stuff, yes. So as I mentioned the time that was a major thing for me - that he allowed me and then also to allow me to leave at half past 4.

But you say the other family issues you are not comfortable sharing?

No, I am not.

Question 20

Okay, so building on that, what effect do you think your coffee conversations have on your work-life balance? You have said you are able to go to him with certain issues and not others, and with talking to him you were able to agree a slightly later starting time. Is there anything else there you want to add?

There were some things that we couldn't share – I remember once I said to him that, at one time, I was doubting him as my manager but I was not comfortable sharing that with him. But now, with the coffee conversations and the regular meetings with him, I am starting to open up and it is getting better than before, I am starting to open up and understand him better than I did before, and having those conversations has helped a lot. I think he knows me better than before, so I think we have worked together for 4 years but the first 2 years it was harder to see what he expected from me but with this open policy it is easy, and I know exactly what it is that he wants from me. The main thing was there was no proper communication between the two of us, so I mean I look forward to them because I know what is expected of me and also what I expect of him - he knows - so it works both ways.

Question 21

Okay good, so I think we have covered the next one too because it is - what effect do you think your manager-coach conversations could have on your life - I think you have pretty much covered that. Are you comfortable with that?

Yes, so it was about getting to know each other better and flexi time.

Question 22

Thinking about the organisation as a whole, what role do you think that manager-coaching coffee conversations could play going into the future?

I think it could play a very big role because without communicating with your boss or manager at work, then sometimes you will have perceptions and think that maybe he doesn't like me or he doesn't trust me or he favours so and so more than I. But if you have those coffee conversations or communication or open door policy, then it makes it easier for you to get to know each other better and it improves a lot. You then also find yourself looking forward to working with a particular person because you know what the person is expecting of you and what you expect of them as well, so builds a good relationship and it improves the relationship I think, on my side. You are then looking forward to impressing or doing more for this person because always, when you have done something good, he will then come to you and say so and so is so happy and you have done a great job for them, so that then shows that he or she is paying attention to what is happening. So, if you can have that in an organisation, and always give feedback to your staff, it can either be good or bad - that plays a very huge role in an organisation. Being recognised plays a very huge role, even if no matter how, you may feel you might have messed up, and if someone just walks in and says they are aware that you have messed up but its okay, that then also motivates you. So, if we can have that sort of a policy in the organisation everyone will look forward, regardless of your salary. Someone paying attention to what you do, I think it plays a very big role, I mean happiness plays a very big role in the work place and in an organisation.

Question 23

So, based on that, do you think there is any connection between manager-coaching conversations and the retention of woman in the workplace, so keeping woman and making sure they don't go somewhere else?

You know, where maybe your manager is a male person then yes, I think the retention can be there but woman to woman, that is where the problem is.

Very interesting, tell me a bit about that?

In my working experience I have met a lot of people who report to a lady and I am telling you they don't like them, they don't want to stay in their place. So I feel at times, I don't think they like woman or the way in which the woman manages them. So woman to woman, they don't want to stay there long, woman prefer to be managed by men.

Very interesting!

Yes, because in our organisation if you find that there is a woman reporting to a woman directly there are problems, but when there is a man, then everything is number one.

Question 24

What skills does your manager-coach display, what skills does he show - and I know you have mentioned some of them in passing, but I need to sort of get down a list - so I am going to get down the ones that he shows, then what you would expect him to show and then what he could do more of and less of.

Leadership skills, he does show ability and mentoring and also his communication skills and also recognition - can I say that?

Sure, if he provides you with recognition

Empathy – he is improving, but he needs to improve on that particular one.

So, I am going to put it here under more of and less of and I am going to put improve empathy.

Then also improve on listening, he does listen also but he needs to improve on that.

Any other skills you think he does display?

Recognition, empathy is improving, communication and listening.

Question 25

Okay we can always come back to it - what skills would you expect a manager-coach to display?

Leadership definitely is one of them, and listening, delegation, communication and trust - is that also a skill?

Yes because trust is important in building a relationship.

So trust, someone who is honest that you can trust, who is also helpful, communication, then someone who is always there and who can show appreciation. Being assertive.

Question 26

Okay, then the last one is what he can do more of or less of and you said he could improve empathy and improve listening - anything he could do more of in terms of the manager-coaching role?

Empathy – empathetic - I don't know if it's an old thing but it always comes to mind, last year I was in hospital and I got sick in the school holidays and it hit me that I was in hospital and just a flower from my manager, to me - that would have been nice; and at times, even now in our office, there are people who are in certain situations but when I am sitting there - it is like you know what this thing is very serious - but I can see he doesn't look at it or act on it the way you would expect him to in a particular situation. Like, I will make an example, I don't know if I can mention, (colleague name) was involved in an accident and she came and was limping and you could see her leg was still swollen and I was like 'I don't expect this woman to be here' even if she kept on telling me she was in pain, but for her she was scared in a way, and she told me that even when he phoned his questions were hard, you know she was never admitted and these things. So I think he still needs to work on that, I think there are a lot of us who have been in certain situations where we expect him to get us - I mean recently one of the ladies sons was in hospital and people just sit with the info, imagine coming back and no one knows about it! So you feel bad for them, if no one tells anyone about it or a phone call just to say how is your child or how are you feeling? So we need to be there and to know the things that are happening to each other, it is important.

Good very interesting, then in terms of less of, is there anything he should do less of as a manager-coach?

Yes, getting more involved and trust us with what we are doing, so trusting that we know what we are supposed to be doing, even though people can still be able to come to you. Also being easily influenced by others stories. So believing in what I am telling him or her and listening to both sides of the story and not just what the other individual is saying to you, and taking a decision based on that.

And also, understand that yes, we might be different races and different ages but it makes for our understandings to be totally different when it comes to certain things. Even as woman, woman take some things differently to how men do in the

workplace, so this is how woman look at some things and he needs to understand that in the workplace. So like I mentioned, when people are sick, they are scared and are not sure how he is going to take it. Maybe its only in the black culture, but when someone has lost someone, then we like to go to that person as a whole and to go and see the family - so those are the things in the workplace that we want our management to give us support on and just give us the go ahead on, if it is supposed to be done that way then he has to understand and in that way, things are going to be working very smoothly and people won't be scared to share. You know everyone is scared to say 'so and so is not here because this and this happened',

Anything else generally, anything you want to add to this that has come to mind?

Really having someone as a manager-coach, it has to be someone that you really feel free to be with and somebody who doesn't just listen to you always talking, but who also gives you some feedback. Then the person must be able to tell you the problems or the dislikes they have with you and be open with you and tell you. I just prefer someone coming and telling me if they have a problem with me. Then I know what they expect of me - I don't want surprises and I like to know what is expected of me, I like to just be open in our conversation. We must not act on our mood swings and lash with everybody, we must just talk about it and then be done with it. Then to go back to the empathy thing, it is something I would love our organisation to take more seriously and tell us what is happening with people.

Absolutely, so being open about things and sharing information with everyone so you know how to respond.

Yes, so you know what's happening.

Good, thank you

The interviewer thanks the respondent and closes the interview.