At the centre of any organisation, whatever its size, you will find its most important resource—the person.

—Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, UK

Work has always been part of life, but for some time now it seems to be getting increasingly difficult to strike a healthy balance, and to mark the boundary between work and personal life. For many individuals, work has become their lives. Ask yourself: is it normal to devote more time and energy to work than to your family or your own needs? A 1999 Health Canada study states that 40 percent of all Canadians say they experience a high level of conflict between work and personal life, and that between 1977 and 1987 the rate of absenteeism due to personal or family problems had doubled. By 2007, the situation had hardly changed: 81 percent of all Canadians¹ hoped to strike a balance between work and personal life.

Today, work is being reconciled with personal life in many ways and is no longer something that only women call for. A very interesting study by a Canadian researcher²

J.-P. Brun et al., *Missing Pieces*
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MISSING PIECES

gives an excellent overview:

A work-life conflict typically involves a job that encroaches on family life, a family life that invades the workplace and blocks advancement, domestic work that overlaps personal time or so much time invested in commuting that no energy is left for other pursuits. The conflict is ultimately between a person’s different roles, with too much to do in too little time. Work-life conflicts involve constant time pressures. They mean contending with life on your own because you live with a workaholic or are the head of a single-parent family. They mean trying to balance your life with one or two jobs. They mean trying to strike a balance between life, education and work. Work-life conflicts mean putting off any plans to have children, or deciding not to have them (perhaps at all) because you can’t imagine juggling any more responsibilities.

You may have noticed that we refer to “work-life reconciliation,” rather than to “work-family reconciliation.” There are many reasons why the first term is more appropriate. To begin with, not only has the workplace changed but so has the labor market. In the UK, Canada and the United States, single and childless people make up 40 percent of all workers.

Because of the new makeup of the labor force, businesses must accommodate not only families but also single people. Such individuals may have to care for parents with special health needs, they may be studying part-time or they may be involved in community projects.

In addition, what is needed is not so much “balance”—the word is little more than a platitude or a figure of speech—as “reconciliation,” the fairest possible one between the needs