

Startup aims to help supervisors, employees foster engagement and healthy work-life cultures

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The boss wants the project completed before the holiday break, your spouse needs to work late and pick up gifts, someone needs to get the children from the after-school programs and feed them a healthy dinner.

Trying to manage demands between your professional life and [personal life](#) can be a major stressor, especially during the already busy holiday season. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has declared it a critical public health concern.

"Our society lacks scientifically proven workplace interventions that help supervisors and employers change organizational cultures and [work-family](#)/life supportive practices to respond to growing work-family/life conflict societal challenges," said Ellen Ernst Kossek, the Basil S. Turner Professor at Purdue's Krannert School of Management and research director of the Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for Leadership Excellence.

More than \$70.5 billion is spent each year in the United States on [employee](#) training; more than \$3 billion of that is for [leadership training](#). Yet study after study, including those from Purdue researchers, continue to show little overall progress in addressing the public health concern of employee work-life balance.

[Work Life Help](#), a Purdue-affiliated startup, is trying to change that with new training technology aimed at helping supervisors better empower their employees to use company resources to manage the [work-life balance](#).

Family Supportive Supervisor Training (FSST) is an online portal to help managers better understand their employees' family/life needs. It also teaches them specific behaviors to be more family/life supportive to their employees with behavior tracking system for increased motivation and pre- and post-training assessment to assess the effectiveness of the training.

"This is the only rigorously field-tested training of its kind," said Leslie Hammer, a professor of psychology at Portland State University, who co-founded Work Life Help with Kossek.

FSST was created for organizations to help managers set goals for developing behaviors supportive of their employees' job performance and personal lives, facilitating change in entire work groups.

Kossek said many employees work for small- and medium-sized firms that do not have many formal work-family/life policies like flextime, leaving most work-family/life practices to be determined by direct supervisors.

"Even larger firms often have corporate cultures making it difficult for career-oriented workers to use policies or offer uneven access for workers in customer facing or hourly jobs," said Kristi Manseth, a senior associate with Work Life Help. "Much of our countries' work-family/life policy is in the hand of supervisors who are critical for creating a positive workplace by providing support for employee access to work-family/[life](#) supports."

The FSST and subsequent behavior tracking activities require supervisors to focus on specific repeated behaviors that have been shown to improve employee work and health outcomes and create systemic change in an organization's culture.

The FSST intervention supports transfer of learned skills and behavior change, as individuals set goals, self-monitor their [behavior](#) and discuss results. Work Life Help develops business and organizational partnerships to implement and disseminate the training products.

Provided by Purdue University

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