



EMPLOYER PROFILE

THE POWER OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE: THE AOPA STORY

Pictured Above: AOPA Human Resources staff and Matt Fleischer from Transit Services of Frederick County celebrate their MWCOG Telework Award at the Employer Recognition Event, June 21, 2019.

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), an advocacy group for general aviation based in Frederick, found itself in 2010 confronting a common problem: as Millennials enter the workforce in larger numbers, how do employers attract and retain talented young people? “We saw a new generation of workers, particularly the creative workers that we rely on, that didn’t want to be tied to their desks all the time,” said Peggy Yusko, Director of Benefits at AOPA. That led AOPA to create an internal task force, comprised of employees from every division of the organization, to examine work-life balance.

That task force guided the creation of a what the company would call its “work-life balance program.” “We call it a work-life balance program because it’s not just a telework program, it’s also a flexible schedule program and a remote work program and a compressed workweek program,” said Yusko. “We want to be able to give our employees work-life balance—just to call it a telework program wouldn’t really do it justice.” Under the program, employees, in conjunction with their supervisors, develop a work schedule that meets both the employee’s needs and the organization’s needs. This may mean an employee works four ten-hour days instead of five eight-hour days, or it may mean that an employee works from home twice a week, or it may mean that an employee works remotely most of the time.

The pilot program was an immediate success and was made permanent by 2011. “We surveyed employees at the end of the pilot and found that both business needs and employee work-life balance needs were being met, and that’s how we knew the program was a success,” said Yusko. Since then, the program has gone through several different iterations in response to feedback from employees and managers. “Each year,” says Yusko, “we’re trying to do more to make it a successful program and get more people to buy in and offer more resources for it.” As of 2019, 38 percent of AOPA employees participate in the work-life balance program in some way.

The program has only become more successful over time. In 2019, the program won an Employer Recognition award from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) for its work-life balance program. Having been a runner-up the previous year, AOPA tweaked their program in 2019, working more closely with MWCOG’s Commuter Connections program and tracking the environmental benefits their program created. AOPA found that in 2018, they eliminated more than 355,000 commute miles and saved 18,000 gallons of gas for their employees.

But the program’s benefits go far beyond reducing emissions. Yusko said, “Our work-life balance program makes us more competitive for talent attraction and retention. When people feel like their manager respects them enough to offer them this flexibility, it makes people feel valued and makes them more likely to stay.” She also noted that the program helps with morale and productivity. An employee survey conducted in 2019 found that both employees and managers felt that the program made AOPA staff more productive.

The program hasn’t been without challenges. Convincing managers that the program is valuable has sometimes been an uphill battle. But as the organization collects more and more evidence showing that it makes employees both happier and more productive. As more and more managers start participating in the program themselves, resistance to the program has faded away. “We used a manager who teleworks, who also has staff who teleworks, as a case study for other managers to show them that it can work,” says Yusko.

She credits both her own organization’s senior management, for making the initiative a priority from the beginning, and MWCOG’s Commuter Connections program, for working with AOPA to strengthen the program and help better track its success. For nearly a decade, AOPA has successfully used this program to help keep its employees happier and more productive, and the organization is excited to keep growing the program in the coming years.

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Director of Benefits at AOPA