Class Activities for **Chapter 14: The Changing Workplace**

**Class activity #1**

Hand the following out to each member of the class to complete individually.

You are a social worker at a company that has been experiencing some downturns in productivity, low morale, and a general feeling that the company does not support a healthy work-life balance for its employees. A number of proposals have come through for what the company could do to improve morale and employee retention. Each one seems to have about equal support from the employees. These are those proposals. Rank them from 1-8 to denote which you think would be best to implement first.

\_\_\_\_\_ Free on-site day care for parents with preschool children, or children out of school for

the summer

\_\_\_\_\_ A wellness initiative that gives employees the chance to take breaks during the day to

exercise in an on-site gym facility or go for a run/walk

\_\_\_\_\_ Fewer expectations of working from home at night and weekends

\_\_\_\_\_ More of a voice in major decisions being made about the company’s direction/policies

\_\_\_\_\_ On-site counseling available for employees going through divorce, other family

problems, or drug/alcohol abuse issues, confidentially

\_\_\_\_\_ Financial planning services made available for retirement and other personal financial

goals

\_\_\_\_\_ More leisure activities for coworkers to spend healthy time with each other, hopefully

growing closer as a team and enjoying work more

\_\_\_\_\_ More flexible scheduling, with later morning starts available for parents or those who

live further away if they are willing to work at night or on weekends

After the students complete the list individually, put them into small groups to try to come up with a consensus. Have them discuss what gets in the way of these sorts of changes in work environments. Would they be interested in working as corporate social workers? On one hand, they could certainly have a positive impact on people’s lives. On the other, the company is keeping them around in hopes of increasing its profits, perhaps more so than it necessarily cares about workers’ well-being. Would this be an acceptable sort of environment for them to work in?

**Class activity #2**

Social work is a demanding job in itself. Like many fields, different social work environments produce very different sorts of work experiences. Other than a specific area of practice, it’s good for your students to have an idea of what *kind* of agency or organization they want to work for—what would the environment be like?

Have each student write down a list of five traits they think would be most important in finding a satisfying social work agency in which to work. If students do not wish to be social workers, they can still identify traits they would like to see in their future workplace. Aggregate the traits students identify on the board. Which are the most frequent answers? Why are these the most important factors? Which elements are absolute deal breakers?

Discuss with your students the best and worst jobs they’ve ever had. What made those jobs so great or so dreary/aggravating? What does having a job one doesn’t enjoy do to one’s physical and mental health? What would it be like to feel trapped in a job one didn’t enjoy, for instance, because there were no other immediate prospects and one needed the money to make ends meet?

**Class activity #3**

Have students discuss the merits of affirmative action policies. Break them into groups to answer these questions.

1) Have minorities and women been disadvantaged systematically in work opportunities in the past? Are they still? If not, explain why.

2) If so, that gave men and whites an unfair advantage and opportunities for advancement that others did not enjoy equally. Is affirmative action a fair way to attempt to equalize that playing field? Why or why not?

3) Whites and men who have experienced unearned advantages in the system the way it stands today have at times claimed they are being victimized by “reverse discrimination” through affirmative action, as they are being punished for something over which they had no control. How would you respond to that assertion?

4) Is there a way to equalize the playing field other than through affirmative action?

5) If we abolished affirmative action, and didn’t replace it with any other program or policy, what do you think would happen? Are there factors still present today that would still give men, whites, and other privileged groups an unfair advantage?