

PEOPLE SCIENCE

The art of managing others for R&D Scientists & those who work with them

WORK LIFE BALANCE: A MATTER OF CHOICE

When work and life demands are in relative balance, you know the impact on your health and mental well-being. Like the circus juggler, you're able to keep all your "plates" spinning above your head, with few plates crashing. There is a sense of being in control and managing your life.

When life and work are not in balance, stunted career growth, job burn out or having frequent melt downs are signals of imbalance. When we are out of balance our body tells us so in subtle and not so subtle ways from insomnia to anxiety to depression. No wonder when we are on center stage at home or at work we may be perceived as overwhelmed, frantic, emotional and misunderstood.

There are lots of reasons to take work/life balance very seriously. Not achieving balance can have an impact on our ability to produce quality work and genuinely enjoy our family caretaking role. Not achieving balance can have immediate and long term affects on those who love us and those who have to work with us.

Let's view work/life balance from the perspective of choice: what you choose to do and not do to work towards balance that is healthy and satisfying to you, your colleagues and your family.

We are human beings not human doings. When we are focused on the completion of tasks we are absorbed in the outer world and we may overlook our inner world of our feelings, beliefs and dreams. In the interest of managing our lives through daily to-do lists we forget about the beauty of the sunrise, our genuine excitement over baby's first tooth, how talented your child is in their school play. This is the being part of our lives, taking a moment to think about how we are living our lives, right here, right now. When we are approaching balance between work and life, we allow ourselves to stop and enjoy life's simple pleasures.

You do have a choice when it comes to how you live your life. You can choose work that taps into your passion. Or you can have a job that's just a paycheck. You can choose a job that demands lots of travel or one where you can work from home. You can choose to work in an environment that supports working parents and flexible work hours. You can select a neighborhood where there are other working parents who face similar daily challenges as you and can offer support.

You can choose to be a martyr or a working parent who knows how to ask for what you need in order to give equal attention to all demands on your time. You can choose to be envious of others who appear to have a life in balance or you can choose to dig deep and find the solutions of within yourself.

Another example of choice is the fine art of saying and meaning "no". Art because saying no is not easy; maybe you're out of practice. Try saying no when you get that overwhelmed feeling, the "I can't manage one more project" feeling. Saying no to one demand gives you the opportunity to say "yes" to something else like more self-care and more spouse-care. Experiment with saying no three times in one day and see what happens. Try it for a week and see the impact on choosing balance.

A final thought on choice. As a professional working parent, you set job and project priorities. You plan your daily, monthly and yearly activities around these priorities. Very rarely do we accomplish all of our job-related priorities. Something comes along to upset our list of important tasks and we have to re-prioritize. If being flexible in setting priorities at work is essential in achieving job success, why can't we apply the same principle to setting priorities at home? Moving toward work/life balance involves flexibility, being able to give in to get more. Moving toward work/life balance may mean that you give up on perfection.

Moving toward work/life balance is a choice for asking for what you want and need or choosing to stay stuck, simmering in silent frustration. You have that choice.



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