

## R.I.P Work-Life Balance

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A few weeks ago, I spent lunch speaking to a group of women on the ever elusive concept of work-life balance. I've been to this rodeo before, and I'm sure you have too. In circles of professional women, it's hard to be in a room without this issue getting raised. We spend an incredible amount of energy discussing, debating, and chasing this ideal.

A 2012 [study](#) conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management found that the amount of employees who consider work-life balance very important to their overall job satisfaction continues to increase. We're so dedicated to the attainment of this concept that there was a national firestorm when Anne-Marie Slaughter wrote in the [The Atlantic](#) that working mothers, the poster children for the idea of work-life balance, *can't* have it all.

Indeed, the perfect equilibrium of work and personal time is a noble goal to strive for, but the reality is that few can achieve and sustain it. (If you do meet someone who has it all figured out, chances are they will be back at it again in a year's time.) Life is messy, and one week or month almost never resembles the next.

It's begun to hit me that we're in the wrong conversation entirely. Balance becomes even harder to attain in a time when we're always reachable, and work becomes more global and fluid. Most balance issues are also geared toward working mothers, leaving out those who are childless or male. Is work-life balance the goal, or is it enjoying the various aspects of your life? Or something that's so individual that we can't put a label on it?

Fellow Forbes contributor Lisa Quast wrote this [article](#) lending interesting evidence to the idea. When speaking with a group of students who asked her about how to achieve work-life balance, Quast discovered that the students "believed they needed better work/life balance because *someone else* had told them they needed it. In many cases, it was a co-worker who had judged them lacking in work/life balance...or a family member."

Some innovative companies have leapfrogged over the balance idea into empowering energized, inspired workers with enough options to live full lives as *they* see fit. That might mean working nights and weekends, or spending time on intensive projects periodically – but the employee has control of their own time as long as the job gets done.



# KRISTI HEDGES

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Although plenty is still being written and theorized about work-life balance, the conversation is beginning to shift toward concepts such as energy management, resiliency and flexibility. Happiness is still the ultimate goal – but happiness and work-life balance aren't the same thing. You can have perfect work-life balance and a dead-end job that leaves you exhausted. Those who are able to lead inspired, engaging lives in various spheres – from work, to family, to personal well-being – have something greater than balance. They have fulfillment. Their life fits.

Seeking perfect balance between your personal and professional lives may be an exercise in futility. Instead, consider these questions to test your fulfillment:

1. Do I have energy for things that are important to me?
2. What gives me energy and engages me? How often am I doing those things?
3. If I could have two extra hours in a day, what would I spend them on?
4. If I could craft a perfect day, what would those 24 hours look like?
5. Do I have mental space to think? How able am I to take a step back periodically and assess what's working and what's not?
6. What are the 3-5 things I need in my life to be happy and healthy? (i.e. have dinner with my kids most nights, exercise, sleep 8 hours, etc.) What can I do to ensure these?

You may find that your "out-of-balance" life is very rewarding. Or that you need to create some control over your time to get more calm or boost your energy. Perhaps you're willing to go out on your own to get the life you want even if it means working more.

What do you think about being in a post-work/life balance conversation? Comment here or @kristihedges.

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