

## Life-Work Balance May Be Misunderstood: Do More, Not Less

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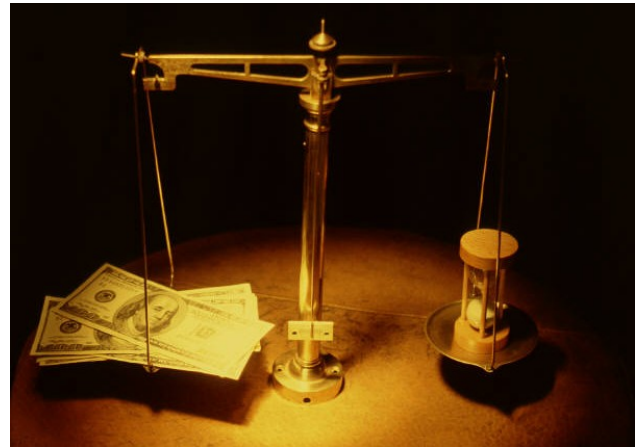
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Finding balance in life is one of the most common desires of working professionals. Many complain about being overworked, pulled in too many directions, and struggle to find time for themselves and their family. The most common solution to this challenge of work-life balance is to create boundaries, set limits, and become better organized. Although these solutions may help with the everyday grind, the true premise of this work-life balance issue may require an entirely new perspective.

The most common perspective to the work-life dilemma is framed around the idea of having more life rather than more work. Work has somehow become the problem. This gives many professionals the idea that if they regain their work-life balance they will become more fulfilled, motivated, and effective. Many would assume scheduled time off from work and encouraging enough rest and relaxation to recharge is a simple solution to achieving more life rather than more work. The assumption causes us to believe that people need to rest in order to find energy. If we could only have a few extra vacation days, a couple more hours of free time, and an extra few minutes of sleep, balance could be achieved. I believe this frame may be

reactive and built around the foundation of an outdated worker paradigm.



Some leaders, owners of enterprises, and other successful professionals never achieve this kind of time balance and perhaps never seek it. They may take a vacation, leave the office on time, and spend time with their families, but they are always working. From their perspective, the idea that time off of work coincides with dropping goals and responsibilities is absurd. When a professional like this takes the common trajectory of going to college, finding a job, and working tirelessly for a long period of time, their real goals may get lost. Many times, when having the perceptive that we must work all the time, we are driven by the

wrong factors. Things like money and retirement completely takeover. Of course these factors are important to any working professional, but where is the balance? Personal wealth must be coupled with other elements if we are to truly find some type of balance.

What if our work was fulfilling? What if we had goals around this work that fulfilled our other values beyond money? What if we were leaving a legacy that would improve our community, our field, or our world? Living a fulfilling life implies that our lives are full, and balance is not a “time” paradigm, but a “what” paradigm. True balance can mean fulfillment-balance.



A few years ago I met Jill, who was a 45 year old vice president and owner of a firm providing services to the health care industry. She was successful and continued to achieve in her field. She worked moderately hard yet she still complained about being “out of balance”. She approached this dilemma from a time perspective and was seeking ways to slowly remove herself further from the day-to-day grind. She said she wanted to spend more time with friends and family as well as pursue hobbies. The answer was simple: find a successor or assistant to help augment her time. Although she took this step, she found herself still unfulfilled. She found more time for herself but treated her time off as a time to rest. The next approach was to take on new roles inside her firm that would challenge her each day. She did, and soon was faced with the same sense of being unfulfilled. She worked hard enough and remained professionally successful, but felt she was still “out-of-balance.” Then something changed. She was asked to sit on a non-profit board, which she had some passion around.

As she spent time on her new board assignment, she began engaging in some difficult projects. Although some of these projects were very time consuming, the voluntary status of this project caused Jill never to consider the time that it was taking. She was working with people around issues that she cared about, causing creative energy to produce new projects and ideas.

At one board meeting she found herself mentoring another board member around a new technology that her company had a stake in. She set up a couple of meetings and soon had a consulting contract that was a little outside her core business knowledge. This out-of-work connection would soon lead to winning an entrepreneurial award from her state, and being named business person of the year in her community. What happened? Her side project was not time off, but pushed her to be more engaged. For Jill, finding balance was not finding more time, it was finding better and more fulfilling things to do. She found fulfillment-balance.

Business owners and entrepreneurs understand fully the implications of fulfillment-balance. These people report that their typical working and thinking day rarely ends at 5PM. Rather, they are working all the time, processing ideas, juxtaposing concepts and people in a complex matrix of activities throughout their entire life. The activities and the time they take remain important, but is not a burden for them. They don't need less time for work; they need more time to achieve goals. What sustains them is that work is the conduit to other facets of their lives. Work becomes the means to a legacy, not a mere means to an end. Yes, they exercise more, they attend their son's baseball games, and they get rest. But when they rest, they are consciously and unconsciously in fulfillment. Their work and personal lives compliment each other, feed them mutual ideas, and

sustain their mission to create new paths to professional enrichment.

If this all sounds strange to you, then there may be a couple of challenges to consider. Are you in the right field, working for the right company, working for the right reasons? If so, then maybe you need to engage yourself more right where you are. If not, then perhaps you need to begin a journey of filling your time with the right stuff. Just taking a vacation is a short-term solution to a life-long dilemma. Another challenge is to consider how you look at work. Is work a means to an end? If so, time balance may be what you need. However, if you would like your work life to be energized, meaningful to your legacy, and not so damn tiring that it requires you to leave in a rush at the end of the day, you may need fulfillment-balance. You need more, not less.



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