

WORK-LIFE BALANCE: How to Strike It and Why It Is Important

By Jessica Zahn

We can all agree that work-life balance is important. The difficulty begins when determining how to establish and maintain this balance.

Introduction

The topic of work-life balance is a fundamentally personal one. It concerns how we spend our time—ultimately, our lives—and what we prioritize. It is closely tied to what is happening around us, both at work and at home, with family and friends, as well as

within ourselves. Work-life balance depends on where we are in our careers and what currently matters most in our lives. When we start considering every aspect it encompasses, the concept can become quite complex and even daunting.

Michele M. Jones, NIA's EVP/CEO, offers a great suggestion for simplifying this idea. She calls it the "Rule of Thirds." Essentially, a third of our time should be dedicated to work, a third to family and friends, and a third to ourselves. The time frame for considering these thirds may vary—from a day, a week, or even a month—and

that is perfectly fine. Michele's philosophy acknowledges that a perfect balance is sometimes unattainable; and in such cases, we should be flexible. For example, we might be facing a critical deadline at work, or dealing with poor health in our personal lives. During these times, we should prioritize what is most important, and aim to reestablish balance when we are able.

Since work-life balance is so personal, it is essential to understand your own philosophy. I believe in being grateful for the company I work for and the opportunities and experiences it has provided, while also remembering that, in the end, I am replaceable. If I no longer work there, my role and responsibilities will be filled. This awareness helps guide my priorities and allows me to maintain my own work-life balance.

In addition to having a philosophy, Michele and I discussed a few other keys to finding balance. One is to find work that energizes, rather than drains us, leaving us ready to take on whatever else is on our plate. Another key is to establish appropriate boundaries with our companies through open dialogue, communication, and mutual respect. By setting boundaries, we create clear expectations and reduce frustration. However, this requires self-reflection. Before we can advocate for what is acceptable, we must first understand what that looks like for ourselves.

This conversation with Michele came at a particularly opportune time, as I was transitioning into a new role and felt pressure to devote more time to work, which meant I was neglecting time with my family. Through our discussions, I was able to assess and reestablish expectations, which alleviated the overwhelming internal pressure I had placed on myself to excel in the new position. Ultimately, I learned that work-life balance affects every facet of our lives, as it centers on what we give our attention to—and, consequently, what we care about. No one else can define what a good work-life balance looks like for you. With that in mind, I would like to leave you with the list of questions Michele and I went through. The best way I have found to create

meaningful change in my life is through a cycle of reflection and action. I encourage you to ask yourself these questions, sit with the answers, and find your path forward:

1. We can all agree that work-life balance is important, but what does work-life balance specifically mean to you?
2. What are your philosophies on work-life balance?
3. How do you implement work-life balance when work and life get busy?
 - What remains a priority?
 - What can be done to complete what is required in a day?
4. Was there someone influential in your life who helped you learn the importance of work-life balance?
 - What wisdom did they share?
 - How did you put that into practice?
 - Do you still practice it today?
5. Can you recall a time when you were not practicing work-life balance?
 - How did you feel at work? At home?
 - What happened in the relationship with those around you?
 - What did you do to get the balance back?
 - How did it change the way you prioritize work and life responsibilities going forward?
6. In the technology era we live in, how do you use technology to improve work-life balance?
7. How have you set boundaries with the companies you worked for over your career?
8. What boundaries have you set with yourself?
9. Have those boundaries changed as you have progressed in your career? How so?
10. What is the one piece of advice on work-life balance you would give to someone starting their career?

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