

Take 5



A five minute read that could change the way you do business

WORK LIFE BALANCE

Essential Goal or Impossible Dream?



When two or more successful and often stressed managers, executives or business owners get together, it normally doesn't take too long before the discussion arrives at the theme of work life balance. There are the usual observations about not enough hours in the day, palatable airline food being an oxymoron and wondering what the kids look like these days. The fact is that most of us do like to work hard and enjoy challenging ourselves; that's why we get to enjoy the demanding roles isn't it?

I have often wrestled with the frustrating and evolving issue of the "right" work life balance. You know the one; do I give it all away, sell up and go and live on the boat/ tropical/ island/ commune/ farm (insert your fantasy here), or do I stop being so lazy and ramp up to the 80 hour week that we so enjoyed all those years ago?

One conclusion that I have reached is that the "right" answer is a very individual thing. I've also come to realise that the appropriate work life balance can be aligned to the ages and stages of our life and I suspect that it is also tied to our generational aspirations. We of the Boomer era seem to be afflicted with the presumption that when it comes to work, more is better.

**The best juggler
can't balance a cup
containing a cup and
a half of water.**

I have seen some people successfully achieve a balance by cycling between professional activities and recreational or family pursuits. This can be in the very short term such as taking long weekends every other week (a formula I have successfully employed myself in the past), or the longer term approach such as the annual, long sailing passage or adventure holiday.



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I guess like most things in life, it is about balance; and balance is not about getting more into the day. Balance is not going into the office at 4 AM so that we can attend our children's ballet recital at 7 that evening, balance is about managing your time so that you can enjoy the more important things.



On a personal note, I am currently discovering "The Joy of Less". I am coming to realise that I need to be sensible about what I can achieve in each of my 168 hours in my week and my 365 days in my year. The best juggler can't balance a cup containing a cup and a half of water.

So then, I guess it's down to our priorities. Most of us in business are pretty good at the prioritising process, we have our own particular approach that might involve analysis and lists and cost benefit analysis, but how many of us actually apply this to the bigger picture? In case you really don't get it, when I say bigger picture I mean this life that we have. I suspect that not many of us sit down and consciously decide on how we will spend specific blocks of our time.

We tend to get caught in the everyday which means that from Monday to Friday we work and then on the weekend we attend to the family commitments and then on Monday morning we start it all over again. If this isn't too painful, then we just keep at it until the status quo becomes unbearable.

So where does the answer lie? I suspect it can be found by asking the right question, whatever that is. If we are not satisfied with our current work life balance we can do nothing; and nothing will change. Our second option is to do something and create change. The "do something" can range from an ordered and considered review of our life goals and priorities or it could be far more pragmatic, such as resigning from those autopoeitic committees that seem to exist for the purpose of their own being.

As a final thought, I would suggest that sometimes we need evolution and other times we need revolution, the "Sea Change" as it was coined a number of years ago. The right answer will come from the right question, I wish you well in finding it. Maybe you could get out the diary and schedule an hour or two to ponder the question of balance and life priorities. You might reach some interesting, if not frightening, conclusions.

Me? I'm off to buy a copy of Trader Boat and see what I can buy in the way of a nice 40 foot sloop (just joking kids!).

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