

HOW TO GET A LIFE AND DO YOUR JOB

Edited by Michelle Conlin

Photograph by Kevin Van Aelst

There is a species of knowledge worker that seems transcendently competent when it comes to finessing work-life balance. These are the people of the tidy desks and tidy homes. The work-life super class. They don't skulk in late like the rest of us. They don't wear rumpled clothes, miss deadlines, or weaken before the vending machine. Are these people for real? Is work-life balance achievable? We asked our readers. Some responders groaned that, owing to a hypercompetitive workplace and the race for status, the answer was no. But more disagreed, having found ways to make their lives less chaotic when it comes to juggling what often feels like two full-time jobs. Sanity actually exists, they say. Hallelujah! Now, dear readers, over to you.

Karyn Couvillion, co-founder, reeboot strategy, Austin, Tex.

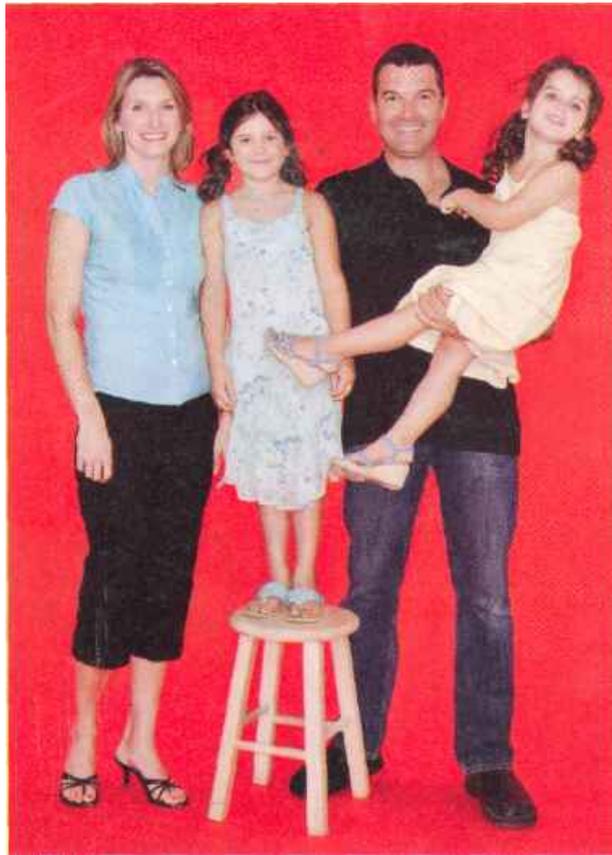
Does this sound familiar? 350 e-mails a day in my inbox. BlackBerry, cell phone, and laptop constantly in tow. Check my Outlook calendar and see that I'm double- or triple-booked in meetings every hour, plus a 7 a.m. global conference call. Being told by management that we cannot hire additional head count because of a hiring freeze, despite the hefty increase in responsibilities for my team. That was me a year ago. The red tape, politics, ridiculous expectations, and meager resources made it nearly impossible to do my job as an advertising and brand manager for a large tech company. On top of it, I had just returned from maternity leave after having my first child. And my father was very sick with leukemia, but I could not take the out-of-state trip to visit him due to a company policy that burned vacation and sick time

as part of maternity leave.

So I quit. So did my husband, who worked in a top advertising agency. In fact, we both quit on the same day: Sept. 11, 2007. We decided that life was too short and we had had enough. What was our worst-case scenario if we quit? Having to sell our home and look for jobs elsewhere? Better than losing our marriage and our sanity.

Our friends and colleagues could not understand it. Rumors were flying that we had come into some family money. Nope. Just several years of saving for a rainy day. And boy, was it pouring. My husband started consulting immediately. I wanted to spend some time with my ill father. The marketing consulting business my husband started took off, and because of our similar backgrounds and experience, it was a natural fit for us to work together.

Ten months after quitting, we have more business than we can handle. My husband named the business reebot strategy because in explain-



Harris and his wife attribute all their quality time to "strategic planning"

ing our rationale for quitting our big corporate jobs he would say: "We needed to hit Control + Alt + Delete on our lives and start over."

When my father died on Dec. 2, 2007, I was there by his side.

Hermes Alernan, assistant vice-president, Affinity Bank, Hayward, Calif.

I was a private banker for seven years and I met individuals who made more than seven figures a year, but the more they made, the

more they spent. My prior manager gave me the following advice the first month I became a private banker: "Meet your needs and control your wants so that you have financial freedom and don't become a slave of your work." So, now I work to live, NOT live to work.

John Harris, account executive, Digi International, Austin, Tex. My wife and I have achieved a great work-life balance through strategic planning.

For example, we obtained advanced degrees in our single years for career paths that pay well; we paid off all our debts the first year of our marriage, paid cash for our cars and our vacations, and have contributed the maximum to our 401(k) plans. We built our house with virtually no upgrades. We paid cash for the upgrades over time and did as much of the labor ourselves as we safely could.

We both work and are probably considered underachievers by our peers even though we have a much higher standard of living than the average person. Our employers provide flexible work hours. So, we go to work early and leave early. In the summer, we are able to pick up our daughters, ages 3 and 6, from day care and spend over three hours swimming in the lake and having a picnic before we give them their baths and read them their bedtime stories. We get the kids to bed by 8:30 p.m. and still have an hour of quality time to spend together every night before going to sleep.



"I am not sure that it is fair to expect balance or harmony. You do the best you can at home and at work and try to maintain a decent sense of humor. You also learn to be efficient with your time. Sometimes you think you have it down, and other times you are

amazed you made it through the day." KATHARINE WEYMOUTH, PUBLISHER,

THE WASHINGTON POST AND CEO, WASHINGTON POST MEDIA

Oliver Tabamo, senior systems administrator, NBC/Universal Music Group, Alhambra, Calif. Last year I got married and started a new job as an IT consultant with the benefit of working from home. Armed with a laptop and BlackBerry, I would some-

COUNT RESULTS, NOT HOURS

"Did you get it done?" is all that matters

times work well past 11 p.m. and on most week-ends. Needless to say, my wife really hated it. It was as if I was trying to prove myself more to my employer than I was to my wife. It wasn't the best way to start off a new marriage. I gained about 30 lbs., and I started to question if the income I was earning was worth the sacrifice.

Fast-forward a year, and now I'm still an IT consultant for a different company. My hours are regulated to 40 a week. BlackBerry e-mails after 6 p.m. don't get read until the train ride the following day, and I was able to shed the extra pounds by riding my bike, running, playing golf, and playing tennis with my wife. As for my marriage... we're planning on starting a family.

Sarah Sherman, managing director, Hoffman Europe, London

I learned that you can learn to completely control how you react to negative people and situations. Most people don't realize it, but they create their own stress.

Christopher Wong, Radiologist, Sydney, Australia

"Work is a means of living, it is not life itself," said Mahatma Gandhi.

I quit a stressful job (that I was good at) in a prestigious institution to work fewer hours in a less glamorous environment, spending more time with family and friends. I have no regrets.

Hursh Chetan, technical consultant, Hewlett-Packard, New Delhi

I lived and worked in the Mideast as well as in India. After working for almost 15 years in very competitive IT companies and in very high-growth markets, I realized that the magic is when you learn how to manage the stress.

Just switch off the e-mail and the BlackBerry and the mind from the office. Focus on the simple things of life—rain, wind, new flowers, green grass, simple food, family visits, a stroll in the garden. There are no sudden things that will change your life for the better. It is the accumulation of beautiful small things.



By Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson

This summer, the future of the American workplace is being argued in—of all places—the halls of state government. Utah Governor Jon M. Huntsman Jr. mandated that most of his executive branch employees switch to a "compressed" workweek in an effort to save energy costs and reduce the state's carbon footprint. In Ohio, Governor Ted Strickland went in the opposite direction. Tired of state offices being empty on Fridays, he eliminated Ohio's decades-old flextime policy in the name of customer service. Both leaders are in a bind that is familiar to businesses everywhere. Brutal prices at the pump are driving up costs and intensifying angst over the environment. At the same time, consumer expectations about getting goods and services around the clock have also never been higher. Employees are demanding more freedom and control to keep up with life's busy pace, while employers struggle to compete in the global, 24/7 marketplace. Which governor got it right? Neither.

Both decisions were born of a false set of assumptions that can be expressed in the formula: Time + Physical Presence = Results.

In an industrial economy, this formula made perfect sense. In an information economy, it crumbles. Most of us can communicate anything at any time from anywhere. Work

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Continue the conversation online: For a story about power stress by Teleos Leadership Institute's founder and a video about the new flextime with the authors of *Why Work Sucks*, please go to BusinessWeek.com/business_at_work

HOME-OFFICE ROMANCE

When the only one to hit on is yourself

has stopped being a place you go and started to become something you do. Work is happening at all hours, across all borders and time zones. The only question anyone really wants an answer to is: "Did you get it done?"

FORGET SCHEDULES

Four-day workweeks are a start. But they aren't the answer. At a time when most of us can carry the office in our pockets, we'd like to get you thinking about a new kind of flextime in a new kind of workplace—one that measures output instead of hours.

First, the question Governor Strickland needs to ask is: What does good customer service look like? Putting the focus on results and taking the focus off of time leads to innovative problem solving. Talk about outcomes instead of schedules. If you offer a compressed workweek, don't require your employees

to ask your permission for what day they choose not to work. It may sound chaotic, but if you're focused on results instead of time, then people will figure out a way to make it work. It's also crucial to embrace your employees' different work styles. Judging people on how they use their time is counter-productive. Instead treat people like grown-ups who know what's best for themselves and for business. Stop assuming that if someone's body is in the building, you are getting something out of their mind. As a business leader, would you rather have someone do rock-star work in less time or mediocre work in more?

Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson, former HR executives at Best Buy, wrote Why Work Sucks and How to Fix It.

ALWAYS ONLINE

55%

Of white-collar workers take calls or e-mails after office hours all or some of the time

Data: YouGov/BusinessWeek poll of 721 office workers on Aug. 4-6

By Andy Borowitz

In the future, thanks to advances in Internet connectivity, more people will work at home. While there are some obvious benefits to this arrangement, such as savings on gasoline and the ability to devote more of the workweek to bidding on *Battlestar Galactica* memorabilia, there is a dark side as well: Deprived of the usual opportunities for employee-on-employee passion, the home-based worker may start looking for love in all the wrong places. And therein lies the ugly truth: When you're your own boss, you have no one to sexually harass but yourself.

Consider my story. A couple of years ago, I jumped at the chance to work at home, envisioning the huge spike in productivity that would naturally result from not having to shave or put on pants. In those early, innocent days, I regularly put in a robust eight hours, interrupted only by lunch and semi-hourly visits to YouTube. Then, after less than a week of this happy routine, everything changed in an instant. One morning, I caught sight of myself in the bathroom mirror and, without thinking, uttered two fateful words: "Looking good." Back at my desk, I was rattled. Perhaps my comment to myself had merely been friendly, but a part of me felt that it was inappropriate. And that come-hither expression on my face was unmistakable; I had seen it many times before on my Match.com profile. No, there could be little doubt: I was hitting on myself.

My unease soon gave way to shame. Had I, as my own boss, created a hostile work environment for myself? Or had I, as my own employee, "asked for it" by showing up for work in my underwear? Trapped in a hell of my own creation, and with no one to turn to in my hour of torment (I was my own HR person), I had no choice but to downsize, outsourcing my job to India. At this very moment, I'm probably putting the moves on myself in an industrial park in Bangalore, but at least I don't have to know about it.



**IF YOU CAN COMMUNICATE ANYTHING AT ANY TIME
FROM ANYWHERE, THEN WHY HAVE AN OFFICE AT ALL?
WORK IS NOT A PLACE YOU GO, BUT SOMETHING YOU DO**