

The Illusion of Work/Life Balance

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Are you trying to walk a tightrope?

I watched with bated breath as, high above the crowd the high wire acrobat performed an amazing feat. Success for this supple and graceful performer means achieving and maintaining perfect balance. She does this by through superb concentration and by tightening and relaxing muscles all over her body. It's stressful - especially knowing that even a minor error could result in sudden death.

The fact is, most of us would be pretty stressed, strung out on a tightrope every day! Yet I've seen countless people get strung out because they fear they don't have the perfect work/life balance they seek.

Like a recent client...

"So what do you want to achieve?" I asked her.

"Well, really I just want to achieve a work/life balance," she responded.

"Hmm, and what exactly is a work/life balance?"

Confusion

Like many others, she seemed confused. She mumbled something about, "having more time for herself" and then confessed she didn't really know. I told her I thought that the concept of work/life balance was a load of nonsense.

That, in trying to achieve it, she was just setting herself up for failure and causing undue stress and angst.

Look at the concept more closely and it becomes apparent why problems arise...

There are some intriguing assumptions buried within the statement, **"I want to achieve a work/life balance."**

For example, that:

1. Work and life are separate from each other
2. They can actually be balanced
3. Work is something that exists apart from life
4. Life is something that exists apart from work
5. Such a balance is achievable (and desirable)
6. The person doesn't currently have a balance.

Examine each assumption further and you begin to see how unrealistic striving for balance really is:

1. That work and life are separate from each other.

Do you not experience 'life' while you're at 'work'? Do you ever 'work' outside where or what you officially designate 'work' to be? For example if I'm weeding the garden, sweeping the yard, washing



dishes or ironing clothes - that's all 'work' to me. Those things are also part of 'life' rather than separate from it.

2. That they can actually be balanced.

Lets see if this is possible. Make a note of all the things you do in a day and the amount of time you spend doing them.

Example:

- ❑ Sleep - 7 hours
- ❑ Eating - 1.5 hours
- ❑ Cleaning teeth - 5 mins
- ❑ Exercising - 1 hour
- ❑ Travelling - 30 mins (You wish!)
- ❑ Talking on the phone - 1 hour
- ❑ Washing/showering/ablutions - 30 mins
- ❑ Watching TV - 1 hour (and the rest!)
- ❑ Physically at 'work' - 8 hours
- ❑ Spending time with partner and family - 2 hours
- ❑ Household chores -1 hour (see - why do we call them chores if they're not work?!!)

Now categorise each into Work or Life.

The example list adds up to over 23 hours and for most of us, there are a lot more things that we fit into a day. And no doubt we would each classify those activities differently. For some people exercising is 'work' for others it is 'life'. Travelling would no doubt be the same.

But What about multi tasking?

Even if you can overlap them and multi-task there are some things it wouldn't be "cool" or even wise to combine; cleaning teeth and eating, for example, could be a bit messy! When you're able to do two things at the same time, like watching TV and eating, how do you categorise each activity? What about the time you are asleep? Presumably sleeping is not 'work' so must be 'life'! But it wouldn't be much of a life if you slept all the time!

When you've classified each of the activities into 'work' and 'life' do the number of hours spent in each 'balance'? Do they even add up to 24??!

3. That work is something that exists outside of life.

One of the issues many face is how they think about work. For example, at the moment I'm writing this article. Is it work? Well, some people would probably say 'yes'. Yet I'd much rather be writing than pulling out weeds, sweeping the yard or ironing. It doesn't feel like a chore because I'm enjoying what I'm doing. So maybe I should include it in the 'life' category?

4. That life is something that exists outside of work.

If you feel you 'live' only when you're not at 'work' - it's definitely time to change your 'work.' If you 'work' 40 hours a week and consider that time NOT to be part of 'life', how does this type of thinking affect your general health and well-being?

5. That such a balance is achievable (and desirable).

See numbers 3 & 4 above!

6. The person doesn't have a balance at present.

They're probably totally stressed from trying to achieve it!

O.K. Here are some 'stupid questions' for you to ponder:

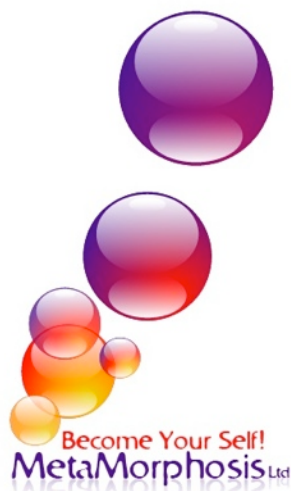
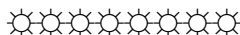
- ❑ If you totally enjoy your 'work' as much as anything else you do, does that mean you should stop 'work' and do something else – related to 'life' - that perhaps you don't enjoy to achieve that illusive balance?
- ❑ If you don't enjoy your work, why on earth are you doing it?
- ❑ What does the 'life' part of the 'work/life' balance consist of for you?
- ❑ What does the 'work' part of the 'work/life' balance consist of for you?
- ❑ Is it realistically possible, sustainable and desirable to accomplish this balance?

And the point is?

Maybe, it's more about combining different and essential aspects of our lives. Using common sense and consideration for the 'important others' who participate in our life's journey. And being consciously aware of how we're using each of the precious moments we have.

It's O.K.

I believe that it's perfectly O.K. - NO! - More than O.K. - it's completely natural to be out of balance in how we run our lives. Make sure you love your life, including your work so much that any boundaries dissolve. Then worrying about walking the tightrope of perfect balance will become irrelevant. Spread the word because the quicker the majority of us realise this the sooner we'll be able to chill out, relax and enjoy a fun life.



Stephanie Philp is the Director of MetaMorphosis Ltd, an NLP Training company based in Raglan, New Zealand. You can find Free Resources including practical tips, articles, humour and other stuff to make your life (including work!) sparkle at www.metamorphosis.co.nz.