

# THE END OF THE WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Instead of trying to separate work and personal time, RACHEL SETTI has a radical solution: don't try.

**W**e live in a world of data overload and non-stop connection. Our phones buzz, beep and vibrate late into the night; we are always just a minute away from the next work call or email. Consequently, the concept of work/life balance has gone the way of the paperless office.

Trying to force a separation only compounds the problem. Unless you actively integrate work and personal time, your happiness and general wellbeing may dwindle.

So how do you work out a viable plan for successful work-life integration, particularly when you feel like you're constantly running uphill in quicksand?

Start by considering some fundamental factors:

- Despite the integration of our professional and personal lives, the need to switch off, reframe, gather

your thoughts and re-energise is – and will always be – essential.

- There are only 24 hours in the day to sleep, eat well and move your body. Remove sleep, food, exercise or re-energising from your routine and you will almost certainly compromise your mental or physical health. This, in turn, will limit your capacity to remain productive and available to your clients and the people you care about. So getting this right is, as they say, a no-brainer.

However, making time for the fundamentals is not easy. It involves setting clear priorities and parameters.

Start by considering areas in your life that you can influence. Capitalise on these instead of focusing on things you can't control. I recently worked with a client who was caught up worrying about myriad possible future problems. While her long-term, strategic focus helped propel her career, she was over-expending energy on things she could

not influence and was struggling to get traction. When she began to focus on areas she had the power to change, her capacity to integrate her work and life improved significantly and, incidentally, so did her productivity.

## Take control

Stephen Covey, in his seminal *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, says that all tasks sit on two continuums relating to urgency and importance. This model, although nearly 30 years old, is as relevant as ever. It provides a practical way to draw a distinction between truly important deadlines and other demands that, when examined, don't hold the same level of urgency or importance.

The key is to control your schedule rather than letting it control you. Devise a purposeful system of prioritisation that steers you towards important matters and away from those that can be delegated or forfeited.

There will always be challenging times where deadlines and other pressures will cause a distinct lack of balance in your life.

RACHEL SETTI

### IF ALL ELSE FAILS

Struggling to integrate your work and life? Try moving. According to the 2015 OECD Better Life Index, the following countries offer the best work/life balance:

1. DENMARK

2. SPAIN

3. NETHERLANDS

4. BELGIUM

5. NORWAY

6. SWEDEN

7. GERMANY

8. RUSSIAN FEDERATION

9. IRELAND

10. LUXEMBOURG

Australia ranked 30, just behind the US and ahead of Japan.

about what you enjoyed as a child. Did you like swimming? Making things? Walks in the bush?

Use these memories to create or rekindle a hobby or focus your mind on new ideas and activities. Commit to action by making a tangible plan that includes details: time, place and people. If time is really tight, be creative. Leave the car at home and walk or run to work (even part of the way), and use the gap to physically separate work and home. Creating demarcations lets you bracket the stresses of your day and reduce the risk of them contaminating your leisure time, allowing you to refresh and reframe your busy mind.

It often helps to take a macro view of your situation. In other words, assess your work-life integration over time, rather than basing your assessment on one bad day or week. There will always be challenging times where deadlines and other pressures will cause a distinct lack of balance in your life. Accept this as a fact of life. However, if you seldom, or never, strike sustained work-life integration, more intense lifestyle changes might be required.

Research shows there is a positive correlation between purposeful living and life expectancy. In other words, when we live a life of meaning, we tend to live longer. Rather than chasing the ever-elusive work-life balance, you might be better off striving to live a life aligned with your personal values and goals – where the interaction between work and leisure is symbiotic and the dichotomy between the two is seamless. **LSJ**



**RACHEL SETTI** is an organisational psychologist and coach who specialises in effective leadership and interpersonal skills.

#### Try these tactics for taking control:

- Look at your weekly diary and ask yourself how important each commitment is.
- Decide what can be deferred, delegated or cancelled – be ruthless.
- Classify the remaining important commitments into urgent and non-urgent tasks.
- Schedule your tasks according to their urgency.

Using this approach allows you to focus on important tasks and reduce time invested on less important endeavours.

#### Add a bit of balance

Thanks to “smart” technology, we are constantly linked to our work, which means that physical detachment from the office is seldom enough to help you switch off cognitively and emotionally. Add balance by filling your non-work time with meaningful activities. Find something you enjoy. If you have lost touch with pleasurable pastimes, think