


**Harvard
Business
Review
Special
Issue**

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Winter 2020
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The New Work/Life Balance



**How to
manage
burnout,**
establish
boundaries,
and find
time for both
work and
family—even
if you're
working
from
home



TIME, AN HERMÈS OBJECT.



Arceau L'heure de la lune
Time flies to the moon

Beating Burnout, Especially Now

AS THE CORONAVIRUS crisis continues, it's becoming clear that the extraordinary pressures on our daily lives are not subsiding any time soon.

Employees working from home have to confront the lack of a practical boundary between work and personal time. Working parents whose children are now at home must make impossible choices about how to split their days. Those choices are made more confusing by the rapid fluctuation of conditions as some areas reopen and as businesses themselves face existential crises and shortages of staff that call for more of their leaders' attention, not less.

How can you balance so many demands sustainably?

Most work/life balance survival tactics come back to the basics, even if the basics look a little different now: Identify your priorities (we're all a little more clear-eyed now about what's important in life). Communicate with your family. Rely on your colleagues and friends. Set better boundaries.

Mindset shifts can provide alternatives to stark tradeoffs, though. In his

classic "Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life," Wharton professor Stewart D. Friedman argues that the question isn't how to balance work and life; instead, it's how to better integrate them. Do this well and you'll find yourself enriched in all domains.

While all these tactics can be helpful, the most powerful solutions ultimately lie with organizations. "In the modern workplace, with its emphasis on connectivity and collaboration," Harvard Business School professor Leslie Perlow writes, "the real problem is not how individuals manage their own time. It's how we manage our collective time—how we work together to get the job done." And this is critical for business leaders to recognize, because when it comes to improving employees' work/life balance, it's not just productivity at stake; it's our personal and collective well-being, too.

– *The Editors*



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GEOFF BEDROSIAN, *Real Estate Investment Executive and Proprietor, Domaine de la Rivière*

MARLA BEDROSIAN, *Proprietor, Domaine de la Rivière*

Pictured with children (left to right) Zak, Shoshana and Duff



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Happiness Traps: How We Sabotage Ourselves at Work

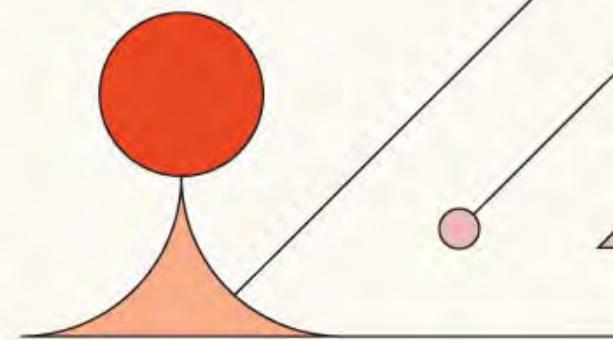
→ by ANNIE McKEE

LIFE IS TOO SHORT to be unhappy at work. Yet many professionals who are free to shape their careers are just that: disengaged, unfulfilled, and miserable. Take “Sharon,” a vice president at a global energy firm and one of my consulting clients. She’s smart and hard-working and has risen through the ranks by following the rules. She makes a lot of money, is married to a man she loves, and is devoted to her children. She had everything she thought she wanted, but she wasn’t happy. Things were tense at home, and work no longer gratified her. She was tired of workplace politics and cynical about the never-ending changes that would supposedly fix whatever was wrong with the company in a given quarter. She resented the long hours she was required to put in. That next promotion and bonus weren’t as enticing as they

used to be, but she still worked as hard as ever: Striving was a habit.

Sharon blamed others for her disenchantment. She believed that the executive team was disconnected from the day-to-day business. She complained to friends and coworkers about management’s bad decisions, the company’s strategy, and what she perceived as a lack of vision on the part of senior leadership. All the members of her team seemed to be slacking.

After coaching Sharon for several months, I grew to like her. But even I found her complaints tedious. I can only imagine what her coworkers thought. When we finally got past why everyone else was to blame for her dissatisfaction, she said, “I know I could probably make things better. I’m just so busy. Besides, it doesn’t matter whether I’m happy







or not. What matters is that I hit my targets.” In her more reflective moments, Sharon admitted that her stress and unhappiness were affecting her work relationships, her family, and her health. She even noticed that she had begun to compromise her ethics in small ways. What she didn’t see was the link between her growing misery and her dwindling ability to do her job effectively.

Sharon is not alone. For years we’ve heard about dismal levels of employee engagement. Numerous studies show that close to two-thirds of employees in the United States are bored, detached, or jaded and ready to sabotage plans, projects, and other people. This makes no sense to me. Why do so many of us accept unsatisfying work, high levels of stress, looming burnout, and chronic unhappiness? Why don’t we fight back?

Multiple factors account for this contemporary malaise. The American Psychological Association found early in 2017 that Americans are reporting more stress than ever owing to politics, the speed of change, and uncertainty in the world. But it’s not always outside forces that push us over the happiness line. Sometimes we do it to ourselves. Throughout my 30-year career advising leaders of major businesses, governments, and NGOs around the globe, I’ve discovered that far too many of us fall into common “happiness traps”—destructive mindsets and ways of working that keep us stuck, unhappy, and ultimately less successful. Three of the most common happiness traps—ambition, doing what’s expected of us, and working too hard—seem productive on the surface but are harmful when taken to the extreme.

The Ambition Trap

The drive to achieve goals and further our careers pushes us to be and do our best. But when ambition is coupled with hypercompetitiveness and a single-minded focus on winning, we get into trouble. We become blind to the impact of our actions on ourselves and others; relationships are damaged and collaboration suffers; we start chasing goals for the sake of hitting targets; and work begins to lose its meaning.

That’s exactly what happened to Sharon. Throughout her life, her parents, teachers, and coaches encouraged her striving, and she attained a lot. She got good grades, top spots on sports teams, and academic awards. When she started working, her ambition impressed her bosses: She gave them what they wanted on time and well done.

Her peers weren’t quite as enthralled, however, and some steered clear as they realized that Sharon always wanted to be number one. To her, that meant everyone else had to be number two. Team goals were not a priority unless they served her purpose, and she got a reputation for throwing people under the bus.

Nothing is inherently wrong with ambition, of course. Sometimes it leads people to hone social skills; after all, effective collaboration is a prerequisite for long-term success in complex organizations. But Sharon’s unfettered ambition was focused solely on her own goals, and peers soon stopped trusting her. They also stopped helping her.

Sharon’s workplace challenges came to a head while she was managing a highly visible project, serving as the interface between her division and a powerful internal client. The company’s

strategy shifted, project goals changed, and the client’s standards were raised, although funding remained flat. Sharon repeatedly heard the client’s requests as unreasonable demands and responded as she often had—by turning the situation into a win-lose competition. She began to cut corners, demanded that her division be paid excessive amounts of money for the work it was doing, and even told a falsehood or two to get what she wanted.

Sharon’s boss, who had protected her for years, finally had to admit the obvious: She had become a liability. He removed her from the project and sidelined her. Her career stalled. Being forced off the fast track was a wake-up call, and Sharon came to see that she had been lonely and deeply unhappy at work for a very long time. Her ambition had turned into a trap instead of an asset. Her ruthlessness was a learned behavior rather than an inherent quality: Success early on had reinforced a winner-take-all attitude that ultimately derailed her both professionally and personally.

The “Should” Trap

Doing what we think we should do rather than what we want to do is a trap that all of us risk falling into at some point in our work lives. True, some of the unwritten rules that shape our careers are positive, such as completing an education so that we can help our families and observing punctuality and civility at work. But too many of our workplace norms—what I call *shoulds*—force us to deny who we are and to make choices that hinder our potential and stifle our dreams.

**■ Ambition pushes us to be and do our best.
But when coupled with a single-minded focus on winning,
it gets us into trouble.**

To be successful in most companies, people have to obey shoulds about how to dress, how to talk, whom to associate with, and sometimes even how to have a life outside work. I've worked in organizations where a candidate's scuffed shoes kill his chances of getting the job and where women must wear makeup and have certain (usually short) hairstyles. I've also been in companies where it's impossible for men to rise to leadership roles unless they are married—to women. And at the *Fortune* 500 only 4% of senior leaders are female, and fewer than 1% are people of color. These shocking statistics tell a tale of who “should” lead and who “should” follow.

Such unspoken norms are not only unfounded (gender, race, and marital status have no correlation with leadership ability); they also take a personal toll when we feel we must hide who we are or pretend to be someone we're not. Kenji Yoshino and Christie Smith showed in a Deloitte-sponsored study of more than 3,000 workers that 61% of people feel they have to “cover” in some way to fit in at work: They either actively hide or downplay their gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, or other aspects of their identities, personalities, or lives.

At some companies women don't talk about their children to avoid the “motherhood penalty.” African-Americans often avoid one another so as not to be seen as part of a marginalized group. Even 45% of white men report covering things that set them apart, such as depression or a child who struggles at school. I have known many who hide anything that makes them look weak or vulnerable—difficulties at home, feeling

burned out—because they feel they should be strong all the time.

Shoulds don't just affect how we project ourselves at work. They often dictate what kind of job and career we aspire to. Take another of my coaching clients, “Marcus.” During his junior and senior years of college, Marcus was involved with a couple of start-ups, and he relished the experience. He secretly hoped to continue on the entrepreneurship track, but as graduation loomed, he found himself wavering. When he got an offer from a prestigious consultancy, he took the job. Six months in he realized that he hated it, but with parents still bragging about his big job and salary and envious friends asking him to get them into the company, he felt he couldn't quit.

At 42 Marcus was made a partner in the firm. He'd followed all the rules and, on the surface, was a true winner. But that's the problem: His career felt like a game. He saw a disconnect between the firm's mission and what it really did, yet he went along. He recognized that how he was expected to treat people—especially junior people—was dehumanizing, yet he did it.

Marcus didn't like consulting and had spent much of his career hiding who he really is: a gay man married to a union carpenter. He had never disclosed details about his personal life at work because it was clear that those who succeeded at his company were straight, and as far as he knew, no other spouses worked with their hands. Living in hiding makes anyone unhappy. And it drags down professional performance as commitment wanes and displeasure with work and colleagues eventually becomes obvious.



Idea in Brief

THE CONUNDRUM

Why are so many of us who can shape our professional lives unhappy at work? And what can we do about it?

THE TRAPS

We often fall into destructive mindsets and ways of working that make us unsatisfied and ultimately less successful. Some of the most common of these “happiness traps”—ambition (win at all costs); doing what's expected rather than what we want; and overwork—seem productive on the surface but are harmful when taken to the extreme.

THE PATH FORWARD

Finding happiness at work begins with honing your emotional intelligence to grasp which trap has ensnared you. Then you can foster three things that are known to increase professional satisfaction: meaningful work, enduring hope, and workplace friendships.

Avoiding the should trap isn't about completely ignoring the rules, of course. Absolute nonconformity and cultural deviance would challenge even the most inclusive organization. Instead, we need to recognize which rules end up being

Overwork sucks us into a negative spiral, causing our brains to slow down and compromising our emotional intelligence.

harmful. Self-suppression and diligent conformity don't bring out our most original, creative contributions at work; nor do they lead to workplace happiness, a key ingredient of sustained professional success. In this case the shoulds that directed his professional choices caused Marcus to take the wrong job and hide his personal life. The rules he thought he must obey became soul destroying and ultimately dragged down his career.

The Overwork Trap

Some of us react to the very real pressures of the “always on” 21st-century workplace by spending every waking moment working or thinking about work. We don't have time for friends, exercise, healthful food, or sleep. We don't play with our children or even listen to them. We don't stay home when we're sick. We don't take the time to get to know people at work or put ourselves in their shoes before we jump to conclusions.

Overwork sucks us into a negative spiral: More work causes more stress; increased stress causes our brains to slow down and compromises our emotional intelligence; less creativity and poor people skills harm our ability to get things done. As the title of a recent *Harvard Business Review* article nicely summarized, “The Research Is Clear: Long Hours Backfire for People and for Companies.”

Overwork is seductive, because it is still lauded in so many workplaces. Boston University's Erin Reid found, in fact, that some people (men in particular) lie about how many hours they work. They claim to put in 80-plus-hour

weeks—presumably because they think excessive hours impress their bosses. What's more, obsession with work can stem from our inner demons: It feeds on our insecurities, assuages our guilt when we see others overwork, or helps us escape personal troubles. Many overworkers believe that working more will alleviate stress: If they just finish that project, get that report done, read all that e-mail, they'll feel less out of control. But of course the work never ends.

That happened to Marcus. He would come home in the evenings—usually later than he had promised—and spend time in the kitchen talking with his spouse and asking the kids about their day. All the while, his phone was sitting on the counter. Two minutes into the conversation he'd pick it up. He thought his family didn't care, but naturally they were hurt. Over the years, his spouse tried to talk about Marcus's preoccupation with work. At first Marcus would explode: “I have to do this! What do you want me to do, quit?” Eventually he'd be contrite and promise to change. But after a short remission, his addiction would return.

Marcus started sleeping less—in part because of late-night and early-morning calls, and in part from stress. He didn't eat well, and he found himself drinking too much. At work he was a grumpy, distracted boss. He began making mistakes—missing deadlines, forgetting to respond to critical e-mails. He couldn't live up to his own or others' expectations, which bothered him tremendously. So he just tried harder.

Like Sharon, Marcus finally got a wake-up call. His came at home. One evening, during their never-ending argument about the phone, the e-mails,

and the calls at night, his spouse gave him an ultimatum: “This has to stop,” he said. “I won't go on like this.” That hit Marcus hard, and it came at a telling moment. The week before, his boss had pointed out some serious problems in one of his projects. She told him that everyone was worried about him—his switch was always “on,” and it was obvious that he was burning out. She'd even said the same thing his spouse did: “This has to stop.”

Marcus struggled to admit he had a problem. Overwork disguised as diligence was part of his identity—and, as is true for many of us, it seemed more important as his career progressed and the pace of change increased. Flatter, leaner companies and ultracompetitive markets force us to do more with less. As technology has advanced, we are performing tasks that others used to do—or do for us. For the many of us who work across time zones, early-morning and late-night conference calls are now routine. And that little device we carry everywhere is a demanding master. Work is literally in our pockets—or on our nightstands.

Whether you've fallen into the “shoulds” and the overwork traps, as Marcus did, or the ambition trap, as Sharon did, the question is, How can you get out? The good news is that some of the same leadership skills and mindsets that make you effective at work can help you escape and rediscover happiness there.

Breaking Free

The first step is to accept that you deserve happiness at work. That means giving up the misbelief that work is not meant to be a primary source of



fulfillment. For centuries it was simply a means of staving off hunger. To be sure, many people still struggle with low wages and horrible working conditions, and for them, work may equal drudgery. But research has shown that even menial jobs can provide fulfillment. What's surprising is that successful executives—today's knowledge workers and creatives—sometimes don't find true meaning in their work. Instead they buy into the myth that it's a grind.

Work can be a source of real happiness, which I define as a deep and abiding enjoyment of daily activities fueled by passion for a meaningful purpose, a hopeful view of the future, and true friendships. To embrace these three components of happiness, we must first delve into the very personal drivers and habits that keep us from fostering them. Why do we work all the time? Do our ambition and desire to win serve us or hurt us? Why are we trapped by what we feel we *should* do and not pursuing what we *want* to do? To answer these questions, we need to tap into our emotional intelligence.

Moving from Trapped to Happy

Over the past several decades, psychologists and researchers, myself included, have come to agree that there are 12 emotional intelligence competencies (see the sidebar above), all of which can help you avoid or break free from the happiness traps. I believe that three—emotional self-awareness, emotional self-control, and organizational awareness—are particularly useful when casting off an outdated mindset.

Emotional self-awareness is the capacity to notice and understand your feelings and moods and to recognize how they affect your thoughts and actions. You might realize, for example, that the discomfort you feel when you buck a work “should”—such as replying to e-mail at 8 PM or during the weekend—signals that you're afraid of being excluded. Going a bit deeper, you might see that this fear has little or nothing to do with your current work situation; it may simply be an old habit of mind that no longer serves you.

Awareness is a good start, but then you need to act. This is where emotional self-control comes in: It enables you to tolerate the discomfort that arises when you understand what you are doing to yourself. For instance, if you know that you check your e-mail at night out of insecurity, you're not going to feel particularly good about yourself. But if you push that feeling aside, you will remain stuck. Self-control also enables us to take actions that may fall outside our comfort zone.

Finally, organizational awareness—an understanding of your work environment—can help you distinguish between what is coming from inside you and what's coming from others or your company. Say, for example, that you're aware that your colleagues are reading and sending e-mails at all hours and that your overwork comes from pressure to conform—not necessarily from insecurity. Now you see that you have a choice to make: You can bravely decide to buck the norms and quit overworking, or you can continue to behave in a way that conflicts with your values (and harms your health and family life). You might even recognize

The Emotional Intelligence Competencies

Self-awareness

Emotional self-awareness

Social Awareness

Empathy

Organizational awareness

Self-management

Positive outlook

Achievement orientation

Adaptability

Emotional self-control

Relationship Management

Inspirational leadership

Teamwork

Coach and mentor

Influence

Conflict management

Source: *Becoming a Resonant Leader*, by Annie McKee, Richard Boyatzis, and Frances Johnston (Harvard Business Press, 2008)

that pulling back from overworking could change the dynamics and expectations of your team, creating a virtuous micro-culture within the larger organization.

Purpose, Hope, and Friendship

Using emotional intelligence to remove barriers to happiness is a first step on the journey to greater fulfillment at work. But happiness doesn't happen magically—we must actively seek meaning and purpose in our day-to-day activities, foster hope in ourselves and others, and build friendships at work.

Happiness doesn't happen magically—we must actively seek meaning and purpose in our day-to-day activities.

Breaking Free from Happiness Traps

Three common traps—ambition, “shoulds,” and overwork—keep people from being happy and fulfilled in their careers. Courageously looking at the ones you’ve fallen into is the beginning of taking control. Start by asking yourself these questions:

1. Which happiness traps keep me in my comfort zone or make me feel safe?
2. Which traps keep me from pursuing my dreams for a better job, a great career, or real fulfillment in the job I have now?
3. Which traps do I keep others in?

Next choose the happiness trap that most affects you.

1. How does it help or hurt you?
2. How does it affect your relationships? Other people may benefit (or think they do) when we are trapped, or they may be hurt. Who in your life benefits from the trap you’re in? Who is harmed?
3. Imagine a life without this happiness trap. What would it feel like? What would you do? How would others benefit if you were free from it? To bring this to life, write three paragraphs as if you were already in the future, starting with “It is now three years since I broke free. I feel... I am now... The people in my life are...”

Meaning and purpose. Humans are wired to seek meaning in everything we do, whether we’re sitting in an office, hiking in the mountains, or eating dinner with the family. Passion for a cause fuels energy, intelligence, and creativity. Brain chemistry is in part responsible: Researchers have shown that the positive emotions aroused by work we see

as worthwhile enable us to be smarter, more innovative, and more adaptable. For example, Duke psychology professor Dan Ariely and colleagues conducted a study in which participants were paid to build Lego models, some of which were dismantled in front of them upon completion. People whose creations were preserved made, on average, 50% more Lego models than those whose models were destroyed, despite identical monetary incentives. We give more of ourselves when we have an impact—even if it’s a small one.

Management scholars have shown that the same holds true on the job: Purpose is a powerful driver of workplace happiness. Yet too often we fail to tap this wellspring of motivation. As was true for Sharon and Marcus, it’s easy to lose sight of what we value and ignore the aspects of work that matter to us, especially if we struggle with dysfunctional organizations, bad bosses, and stress. And if that happens, disengagement is just around the corner. In the absence of meaning, we have no reason to give our all.

Each of us finds meaning and purpose in work differently, but in my experience with people from all over the globe and in all professions, I’ve seen some similarities: We want to fight for a cause we care about. We want to create and innovate. We want to fix problems and improve our workplaces. We want to learn and grow. And, as studies have shown, meaningful work is as possible and important for a janitor or a middle manager as it is for a CEO.

As you discover which aspects of your job are truly fulfilling—and which are soul destroying—you will face choices about

how to spend your time and what to pursue in your career. Marcus decided to begin seriously exploring that business he’d always dreamed of having. He looked at finances and at how to leverage his relationships at his current firm and with clients. He and his spouse considered the lifestyle changes that launching a business would require. In the end, he created a bridge: He worked as an associate at his firm part-time for two years while seeking funding and starting his new business.

Hope. If you’ve ever faced adversity, a crisis, or a loss, you know that hope is what got you through. It makes us want to get up every day and keep trying, even when life is tough. Hope makes it possible to navigate complexity; handle stress, fear, and frustration; and understand hectic organizations and lives. That’s in part because hope, like purpose, positively affects our brain chemistry. Research has shown that when we feel optimistic, our nervous system shifts from fight-or-flight to calm and poised to act. For example, one study demonstrated that when individuals are coached in a way that sparks positive feelings and an inspiring vision of the future, areas of the brain associated with the parasympathetic nervous system are activated: Breathing slows, blood pressure drops, and the immune system functions better. We think more rationally and are better able to manage our emotions. We feel energized and ready to plan for the future.

That’s how Sharon moved from awareness of why she was so focused on winning to creating a career that she was authentically excited about. Through conversations with her husband (who had cautioned her for years about her



unregulated ambition), she was able to craft a vision of what she wanted from her work—one that relied not on getting the next promotion or winning some endless game but on the kind of life she wanted to lead.

Employers often use vision statements to instill optimism and positivity in their employees, but unfortunately even the most well-crafted ones are rarely compelling enough to keep people hopeful over the long term. To be happy at work, we must feel that our responsibilities and opportunities fit a *personal* vision—one that speaks to our values, desires, and beliefs—and we must imagine pathways that lead to it. Hope is really about planning—it encourages us to chart a course even in the face of seemingly dire prospects; it encourages us to take concrete, practical actions that are tied to how we want our lives and careers to unfold.

I've met many people in my work who shy away from big dreams, fearing that they'll only be disappointed. But I don't believe there's any such thing as false hope. Hope is not magical thinking or fantasy; it's a powerful, positive emotional experience that leads to courage, thoughtful plans, and concrete actions.

Friendship. If you work with people you like and respect, and if they like and respect you in return, you probably enjoy going to work. But if you're in a job where you feel constantly on guard, disdained, or excluded, you're probably on your way to deep unhappiness—or there already. You may tell yourself that the situation is tolerable or that you don't need friends at work. That's not true.

In fact, good relationships are the backbone of successful organizations. People who care for one another give

generously of time, talent, and resources. Gallup found that close work relationships boost employee satisfaction by 50% and that people with a best friend at work are seven times as likely as others to engage fully in their work. Mutual respect motivates us to resolve conflicts so that everyone wins. And when we believe that we will be accepted for who we are, that we have important roles to play, and that we're part of a team, we are more committed to collective goals.


Warm, positive relationships are important at work for very human reasons. Since the beginning of time, people have organized into tribes that labor and play together. Today organizations are our tribes. We want to work in a group or a company that makes us proud and inspires us to give our best efforts.

We also want people to care about us and value us as human beings. And we need to do the same for others. We thrive physically and psychologically when we feel compassion for others and see that they are concerned for our well-being in return. In fact, the Harvard Grant Study, among others, has found that love—yes, love—is the single most important determinant of happiness in life. What's more, people who experience love—including the love involved in friendships—are more successful, even financially. (The study notes that during peak earning years, participants who scored highest on “warm relationships” made an average of \$141,000 more a year.)

But love at work? Most people shy away from the notion, leery of romance in the workplace (although we know it occurs often). What we need at work, however, is love founded on caring, concern, and camaraderie. Such relation-

ships are full of trust and generosity, a source of delight, and make work fun.

TOO MANY PEOPLE believe that if they're successful, they'll be happy. That's backward. The author and psychologist Shawn Achor says it straightforwardly: “Happiness comes before success.” That's because the positive emotions aroused by being engaged, fulfilled, and valued at work have a host of benefits: Our brains function better; we are more creative and adaptable; we have more energy, make smarter decisions, and better manage complexity. It's simple: Happy people perform better than their unhappy peers.

It's time to claim our right to happiness at work. To start, let's replace outdated beliefs with a new understanding of what we can expect from work—and from one another. Let's break free of traps that keep us from happiness. And let's begin the journey to fulfillment by focusing on discovering and living our purpose at work, reaching for a compelling vision of the future, and turning colleagues into real friends. These things will help us create workplaces that honor our humanity and foster common decency and sustainable success, workplaces in which ideas, needs, and desires matter—as does happiness. 

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IDENTIFY YOUR PRIORITIES

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED MARCH 2014

Manage Your Work, Manage Your Life

Zero in on what really matters.

→ by BORIS GROYSBERG and ROBIN ABRAHAMS

WORK/LIFE BALANCE IS at best an elusive ideal and at worst a complete myth, today's senior executives will tell you. But by making deliberate choices about which opportunities they'll pursue and which they'll decline, rather than simply reacting to emergencies, leaders can and do engage meaningfully with work, family, and community. They've discovered through hard experience that prospering in the senior ranks is a matter of carefully combining work and home so as not to lose themselves, their loved ones, or their foothold on success. Those who do this most effectively involve their families in work decisions and activities. They also vigilantly manage their own human capital, endeavoring to give both work and home their due—over a period of years, not weeks or days.

That's how the 21st-century business leaders in our research said they reconcile their professional and personal lives. In this article we draw on five years' worth of interviews with almost 4,000 executives worldwide, conducted by students at Harvard Business School, and a survey of 82 executives in an HBS leadership course.

Deliberate choices don't guarantee complete control. Life sometimes takes over, whether it's a parent's dementia or a teenager's car accident. But many of the executives we've studied—men and women alike—have sustained their momentum during such challenges while staying connected to their families. Their stories and advice reflect five main themes: defining success for yourself, managing technology, building support

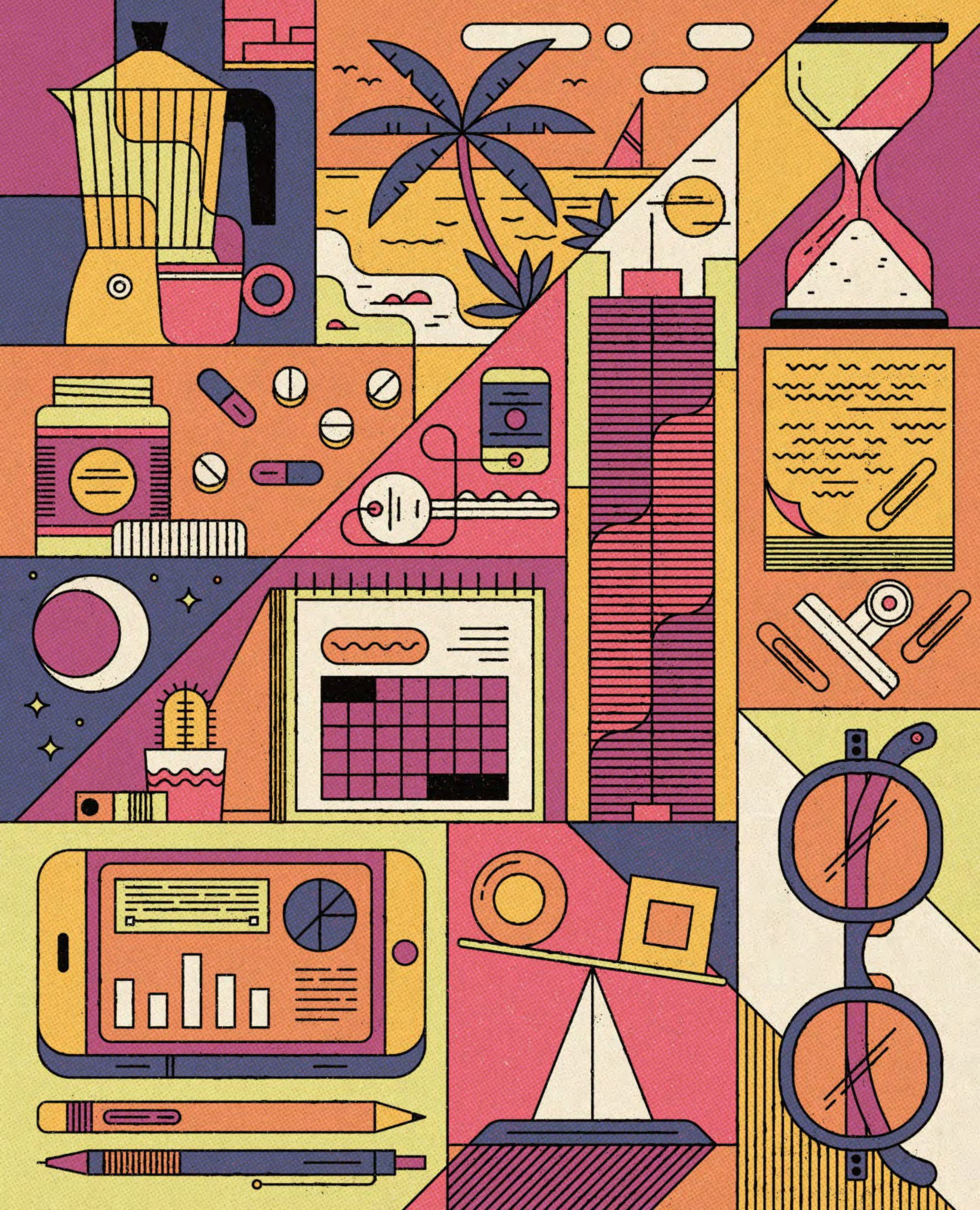
networks at work and at home, traveling or relocating selectively, and collaborating with your partner.

Defining Success for Yourself

When you are leading a major project, you determine early on what a win should look like. The same principle applies to leading a deliberate life: You have to define what success means to you—understanding, of course, that your definition will evolve over time.

Executives' definitions of professional and personal success run a gamut from the tactical to the conceptual (see the exhibit "How Leaders Define Work/Life 'Wins'"). For one leader, it means being home at least four nights a week. For another, it means understanding what's going on in the lives of family members. For a third, it's about having emotional energy at both work and home.

Some intriguing gender differences emerged in our survey data: In defining professional success, women place more value than men do on individual achievement, having passion for their work, receiving respect, and making a difference but place less value on organizational achievement and ongoing learning and development. A lower percentage of women than of men list financial achievement as an aspect of personal or professional success. Rewarding relationships are by far the most common element of personal success for both sexes, but men list merely having a family as an indicator of success, whereas women describe what a good family life looks like to them. Women are also more likely

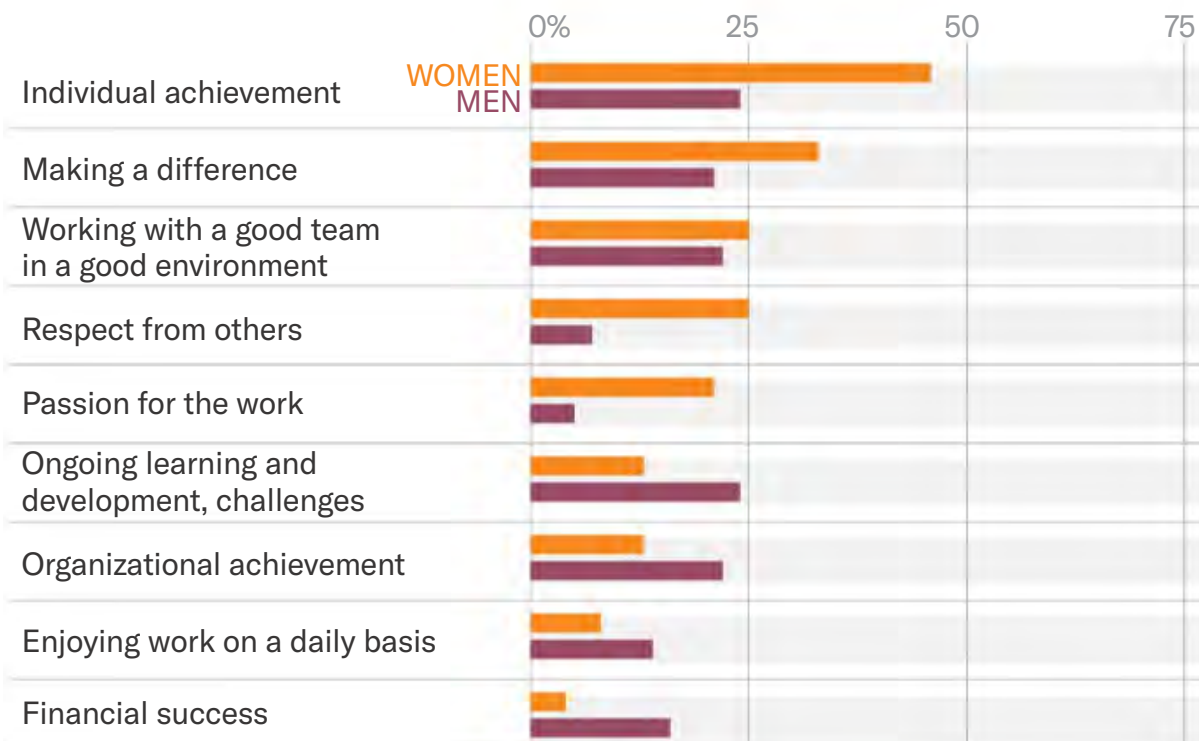




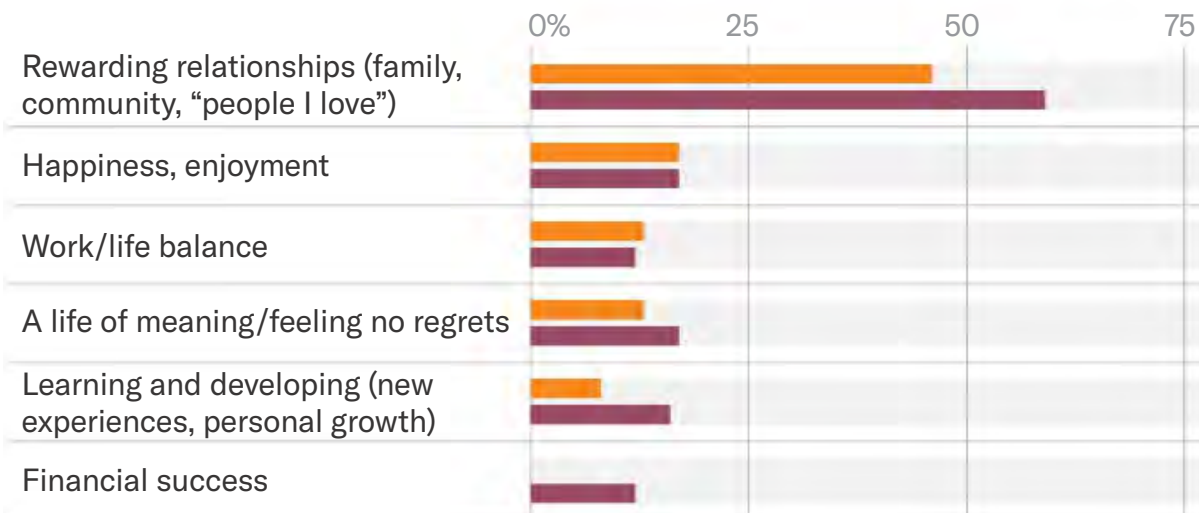
How Leaders Define Work/Life “Wins”

In their definitions of professional and personal success, executives highlight these elements:

PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS MEANS...



PERSONAL SUCCESS MEANS...



to mention the importance of friends and community as well as family.

The survey responses consisted of short phrases and lists, but in the interviews executives often defined personal success by telling a story or describing an ideal self or moment in time. Such narratives and self-concepts serve as motivational goalposts, helping people prioritize activities and make sense of conflicts and inconsistencies.

When work and family responsibilities collide, for example, men may lay claim to the cultural narrative of the good provider. Several male executives who admitted to spending inadequate time with their families consider absence an acceptable price for providing their children with opportunities they themselves never had. One of these men, poor during his childhood, said that his financial success both protects his children and validates his parents’ struggles. Another even put a positive spin on the breakup of his family: “Looking back, I would have still made a similar decision to focus on work, as I was able to provide for my family and become a leader in my area, and these things were important to me. Now I focus on my kids’ education... and spend a lot more time with them over weekends.”

Even the men who pride themselves on having achieved some degree of balance between work and other realms of their lives measure themselves against a traditional male ideal. “The 10 minutes I give my kids at night is one million times greater than spending that 10 minutes at work,” one interviewee said. It’s difficult to imagine a woman congratulating herself for spending 10 minutes a day with her children, but a

man may consider the same behavior exemplary.

Indeed, women rarely view themselves as working *for* their families the way men do. Men still think of their family responsibilities in terms of bread-winning, whereas women often see theirs as role modeling for their children. Women emphasize (far more than men do) how important it is for their kids—particularly their daughters—to see them as competent professionals. One said, “I think that work is such a big part of who I am. I want my kids to understand what I do. I am a whole being.”

Many women said that the most difficult aspect of managing work and family is contending with cultural expectations about mothering. One admitted that she stopped working at home after her daughter referred to the Bloomberg network as “Mommy’s channel.” Another commented, “When you are paid well, you can get all the [practical] help you need. What is the most difficult thing, though—what I see my women friends leave their careers for—is the real emotional guilt of not spending enough time with their children. The guilt of *missing out*.”

Both men and women expressed versions of this guilt and associated personal success with not having regrets. They often cope by assigning special significance to a particular metric, such as never missing a Little League game or checking in once a day no matter what. “I just prioritize dinner with my family as if it was a 6 PM meeting with my most important client,” said one interviewee. Another offered this suggestion: “Design your house right—have a table in the kitchen where your kids can do home-

work while your husband cooks and you drink a glass of red wine.” Though expressed as advice, this is clearly her very personal, concrete image of what success at home looks like.

Managing Technology

Nearly all the interviewees talked about how critical it is to corral their e-mails, text messages, voice mails, and other communications. Deciding when, where, and how to be accessible for work is an ongoing challenge, particularly for executives with families. Many of them cautioned against using communications technology to be in two places at once, insisting on the value of undivided attention. “When I’m at home, I really am at home,” said one. “I force myself to not check my e-mail, take calls, et cetera. I want to give my kids 100% of my attention. But this also works the other way around, because when I’m at work I really want to focus on work. I believe that mixing these spheres too much leads to confusion and mistakes.”

That last point is a common concern: Always being plugged in can erode performance. One leader observed that “certain cognitive processes happen when you step away from the frenetic responding to e-mails.” (The history of science, after all, is marked by insights that occurred not in the laboratory but while the scientist was engaged in a mundane task—or even asleep.) Another executive pointed out that 24-hour availability can actually hamper initiative in an organization: “If you have weak people who must ask your advice all the time, you feel important. But there is a difference between being truly important and just not



Idea in Brief

THE PROBLEM

Senior executives in this generation feel they can’t achieve “balance” through constant juggling, which prevents them from engaging meaningfully either at work or at home.

THE SOLUTION

They find that they’re more focused—and effective—when they make deliberate choices about which opportunities to pursue in both realms.

THE OUTCOME

Leaders who carefully manage their own human capital in this way maintain a higher degree of satisfaction professionally and personally.

letting anyone around you do anything without you.”

Strikingly, some people at the top are starting to use communications technology less often while they’re working. Several invoked the saying “You can’t raise a kid by phone”—and pointed out that it’s not the best way to manage a team, either. Often, if it’s logistically possible, you’re better off communicating in person. How do you know when that’s the case? One interviewee made an important distinction between broadcasting information and exchanging and analyzing ideas: “Speaking [on the phone] is easy, but careful, thoughtful listening becomes very challenging. For the most important conversations, I see a real trend moving back to face-to-face. When you’re evaluating multibillion-dollar deals...you have to build a bridge to the people.”

Many leaders believe in acquiring global experience and racking up travel miles while they're young and unencumbered.

When it comes to technology in the home, more than a third of the surveyed executives view it as an invader, and about a quarter see it as a liberator. (The rest are neutral or have mixed feelings.) Some of them resent the smartphone's infringement on family time: "When your phone buzzes," one ruefully noted, it's difficult to "keep your eyes on that soccer field." Others appreciate the flexibility that technology affords them: "I will probably leave here around 4 PM to wrangle my kids," said one participant, "but I will be back and locked into my network and e-mails by 8 PM." Another participant reported, "Sometimes my kids give me a hard time about being on my BlackBerry at the dinner table, but I tell them that my BlackBerry is what enables me to be home with them."

Both camps—those who hate being plugged in and those who love it—acknowledged that executives must learn to manage communications technology wisely. Overall, they view it as a good servant but a bad master. Their advice in this area is quite consistent: Make yourself available but not *too* available to your team; be honest with yourself about how much you can multitask; build relationships and trust through face time; and keep your inbox under control.

Building Support Networks

Across the board, senior executives insisted that managing family and professional life requires a strong network of behind-the-scenes supporters. Absent a primary caregiver who stays at home, they see paid help or assistance from extended family as a necessity. The women in our sample are adamant about this.

One said, "We hire people to do the more tactical things—groceries, cooking, helping the children dress—so that we can be there for the most important things." Even interviewees without children said they needed support at home when they became responsible for aging parents or suffered their own health problems.

Emotional support is equally essential. Like anyone else, executives occasionally need to vent when they're dealing with something crazy or irritating at work, and friends and family are a safer audience than colleagues. Sometimes leaders also turn to their personal networks for a fresh perspective on a problem or a decision, because members of their teams don't always have the distance to be objective.

Support at work matters too. Trusted colleagues serve as valuable sounding boards. And many leaders reported that health crises—their own or family members'—might have derailed their careers if not for compassionate bosses and coworkers. The unexpected can waylay even the most carefully planned career.

"When you're young, you think you can control everything," one interviewee said, "but you can't." Executives told stories about heart attacks, cancer, and parents in need of care. One talked about a psychotic reaction to medication. In those situations, mentors and team members helped leaders weather difficult times and eventually return to business as usual.

What about mixing personal and professional networks, since executives must draw on both anyway? That's up for discussion. The men we surveyed tend to prefer separate networks, and the women are pretty evenly split.

Interviewees who favor integration said it's a relief to be "the same person" in all contexts and natural to form friendships at work, where they spend most of their time. Those who separate their work lives from their private lives have many reasons for doing so. Some seek novelty and a counterbalance to work. "If all of your socializing centers around your work life, you tend to experience an ever-decreasing circle of influence and ideas," one pointed out. Others want to protect their personal relationships from the churn of the workplace.

Many women keep their networks separate for fear of harming their image. Some never mention their families at work because they don't want to appear unprofessional. A few female executives won't discuss their careers—or even mention that they have jobs—in conversations outside work. But again, not all women reported such conflict between their professional and personal "selves," and several suggested that the tide is turning. One pointed out, "The more women have come into the workplace, the more I talk about my children."

Traveling or Relocating Selectively

Discussions about work/life balance usually focus on managing time. But it's also critical to manage your location—and, more broadly, your role in the global economy. When leaders decide whether to travel or relocate (internationally or domestically), their home lives play a huge part. That's why many of them believe in acquiring global experience and racking up travel miles while they're young and unencumbered. Of those



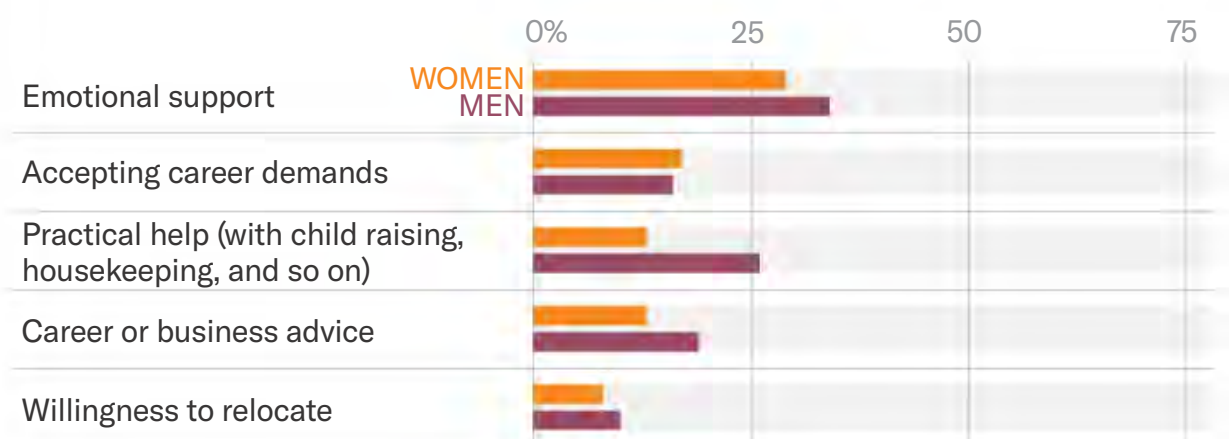
surveyed, 32% said they had turned down an international assignment because they did not want to relocate their families, and 28% said they had done so to protect their marriages.

Several executives told stories about getting sidetracked or derailed in their careers because a partner or spouse needed to relocate. Of course, travel becomes even trickier with children. Many women reported cutting back on business trips after having children, and several executives of both sexes said they had refused to relocate when their children were adolescents. “When children are very young, they are more mobile,” one explained. “But once they are 12 or 13, they want to be in one place.”

Female executives are less likely than men to be offered or accept international assignments, in part because of family responsibilities but also because of the restrictive gender roles in certain cultures or perceptions that they are unwilling to relocate. Our survey results—from a well-traveled sample—jibe with student interviewers’ qualitative findings. Almost none of the men surveyed (less than 1%, compared with 13% of the women) had turned down an international assignment because of cultural concerns. But for female executives, not all travel is created equal: Gender norms, employment laws, health-care access, and views on work/life balance vary from country to country. One American woman said it requires extra effort in Europe to make sure she doesn’t “come off as being intimidating,” a concern she attributes in part to being tall. Another woman said that in the Middle East she has had to bring male colleagues to meetings to prove her credibility.

What Partners Contribute

Executives say that their partners and spouses share their vision of success, bring complementary skills, and provide the following types of support:



Though women in particular have such difficulties, international assignments are not easy for anyone, and they may simply not be worth it for many executives. Members of both sexes have built gratifying careers while grounding themselves in a particular country or even city. However, if travel is undesirable, ambitious young executives should decide so early on. That way they can avoid getting trapped in an industry that doesn’t mesh with their geographic preferences and give themselves time to find ways other than travel to signal open-mindedness, sophistication, skill diversity, and willingness to go above and beyond. (Several executives noted that international experience is often viewed as a sign of those personal attributes.) “International experience can be helpful,” one executive observed, “but it’s just as important to have had exposure across the business lines. Both allow you to understand that not everybody thinks as

you do.” Some executives even question the future of globe-hopping, noting that carbon costs, fuel costs, and security concerns may tighten future travel budgets.

Collaborating with Your Partner

Managing yourself, technology, networks, travel—it’s a tall order. Leaders with strong family lives spoke again and again of needing a shared vision of success for everyone at home—not just for themselves. Most of the executives in our sample have partners or spouses, and common goals hold those couples together. Their relationships offer both partners opportunities—for uninterrupted (or less interrupted) work, for adventurous travel, for intensive parenting, for political or community impact—that they might not otherwise have had.

Leaders also emphasized the importance of complementary relationships.

Executives of both sexes consider the tension between work and family to be primarily a women's problem.

About the Research

Since 2008 more than 600 students in Harvard Business School's second-year Managing Human Capital course have interviewed 3,850 C-suite executives and leaders (of whom 655 were CEOs, presidents, or board members) at companies and non-profits around the world.

The goal? To gain greater insight into how today's top leaders make choices in their professional and personal lives. This project has been a true partnership between the students and the executives. Everyone involved wanted to deeply explore what it means for leaders to manage their human capital in the 21st century—and more specifically, in the wake of the recent global recession.

The executives were a diverse group (44% female, 56% male) and represented a wide range of industries, including finance, retail, energy, health care, and technology. They came from 51 countries, and 45% of them had worked in countries other than the United States.

The interviews were semistructured: As long as students related their questions to topics covered in Managing Human Capital, they were allowed considerable leeway in what to ask and how far to go in following up on responses. That way they could dig into the issues they found most compelling.

To supplement the interviews, we surveyed 82 senior executives who were attending a 2012 leadership course at HBS. We asked them about their experiences managing their careers and families. The sample consisted of 58 men and 24 women from 33 countries in Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and North and South America. Statistics in the article come from the survey data, and quotations come from the field data.

Many said how much they value their partners' emotional intelligence, task focus, big-picture thinking, detail orientation—in short, whatever cognitive or behavioral skills balance out their own tendencies. And many of those we surveyed consider emotional support the biggest contribution their partners have made to their careers. Both men and women often mentioned that their partners believe in them or have urged them to take business risks or pursue job opportunities that were not immediately rewarding but led to longer-term satisfaction. They also look to their partners to be sounding boards and honest critics. One executive said that her partner asks “probing questions to challenge my thinking so I can be better prepared for an opposing viewpoint.”

A partner's support may come in many forms, but what it almost always boils down to is making sure the executive manages his or her own human capital effectively. The pressures and demands on executives are intense, multi-directional, and unceasing. Partners can help them keep their eyes on what matters, budget their time and energy, live healthfully, and make deliberate choices—sometimes tough ones—about work, travel, household management, and community involvement.

Men, however, appear to be getting more spousal support overall. Male interviewees—many of whom have stay-at-home wives—often spoke of their spouses' willingness to take care of children, tolerate long work hours, and even relocate, sometimes as a way of life. But by and large, they no longer seem to expect the classic 1950s “corporate wife,” who hosted dinners for the boss and

cocktail parties for clients. (Exceptions exist in some countries and industries. One male executive who works in oil fields said, “When you are living and working in those camp environments, it is indispensable to have your wife talk with other spouses.”) Men frequently noted that their partners won't allow them to neglect their families, health, or social lives. For example: “My wife is militant about family dinner, and I am home every night for dinner even if I have to work afterward.”

Women, by contrast, slightly more often mentioned their partners' willingness to free them from traditional roles at home. One explained, in a typical comment, “He understands the demands of my role and does not put pressure on me when work takes more time than I would like.” In other words, male executives tend to praise their partners for making positive contributions to their careers, whereas women praise theirs for not interfering.

When we look at the survey data, we see other striking differences between the sexes. Fully 88% of the men are married, compared with 70% of the women. And 60% of the men have spouses who don't work full-time outside the home, compared with only 10% of the women. The men have an average of 2.22 children; the women, 1.67.

What Tomorrow's Leaders Think

The fact that the interviewees all agreed to take time from their hectic schedules to share their insights with students might introduce a selection effect. Busy leaders who choose to help students



presumably value interpersonal relationships. Because they're inclined to reflect on work and life, they're probably also making deliberate choices in both realms—and they certainly have enough money to pay for support at home. All that may explain why many interviewees reported being basically happy despite their struggles and why few mentioned serious damage to their marriages or families due to career pressures. This sample is an elite group of people better positioned than most to achieve work/life balance. That they nevertheless consider it an impossible task suggests a sobering reality for the rest of us.

Our student interviewers say, almost universally, that the leaders they spoke with dispensed valuable advice about how to maintain both a career and a family. One interviewer reported, "All acknowledged making sacrifices and concessions at times but emphasized the important role that supportive spouses and families played." Still, many students are alarmed at how much leaders sacrifice at home and how little headway the business world has made in adapting to families' needs.

Male executives admitted that they don't prioritize their families enough. And women are more likely than men to have forgone kids or marriage to avoid the pressures of combining work and family. One said, "Because I'm not a mother, I haven't experienced the major driver of inequality: having children." She added, "People assume that if you don't have kids, then you either can't have kids or else you're a hard-driving bitch. So I haven't had any negative career repercussions, but I've probably been judged personally."

Executives of both sexes consider the tension between work and family to be primarily a women's problem, and the students find that discouraging. "Given that leadership positions in corporations around the world are still dominated by men," one explained, "I fear that it will take many organizations much longer than it should to make accommodations for women to...effectively manage their careers and personal lives."


Students also resist leaders' commonly held belief that you can't compete in the global marketplace while leading a "balanced" life. When one executive argued that it's impossible to have "a great family life, hobbies, and an amazing career" all at the same time, the student interviewing him initially thought, "That's his perspective." But after more conversations with leaders? "Every single executive confirmed this view in one way or another, and I came to believe that it is the reality of today's business world." It remains to be seen whether, and how, that reality can be changed for tomorrow.

WE CAN'T PREDICT what the workplace or the family will look like later in this century, or how the two institutions will coexist. But we can assert three simple truths:

Life happens. Even the most dedicated executive may suddenly have his or her priorities upended by a personal crisis—a heart attack, for instance, or a death in the family. As one pointed out, people tend to ignore work/life balance until "something is wrong." But that kind of disregard is a choice, and not a wise one. Since when do smart executives assume that everything will work out just

fine? If that approach makes no sense in the boardroom or on the factory floor, it makes no sense in one's personal life.

There are multiple routes to success. Some people plan their careers in detail; others grab whatever opportunity presents itself. Some stick with one company, building political capital and a deep knowledge of the organization's culture and resources; others change employers frequently, relying on external contacts and a fresh perspective to achieve success. Similarly, at home different solutions work for different individuals and families. Some executives have a stay-at-home partner; others make trade-offs to enable both partners to work. The questions of child care, international postings, and smartphones at the dinner table don't have "right" answers. But the questions need to be asked.

No one can do it alone. Of the many paths to success, none can be walked alone. A support network is crucial both at and outside work—and members of that network must get their needs met too. In pursuit of rich professional and personal lives, men and women will surely continue to face tough decisions about where to concentrate their efforts. Our research suggests that earnestly trying to focus is what will see them through. 

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How Will You Measure Your Life?

Don't reserve your best business thinking for your career.

→ by CLAYTON M. CHRISTENSEN

BEFORE I PUBLISHED *The Innovator's Dilemma*, I got a call from Andrew Grove, then the chairman of Intel.

He had read one of my early papers about disruptive technology, and he asked if I could talk to his direct reports and explain my research and what it implied for Intel. Excited, I flew to Silicon Valley and showed up at the appointed time, only to have Grove say, “Look, stuff has happened. We have only 10 minutes for you. Tell us what your model of disruption means for Intel.” I said that I couldn't—that I needed a full 30 minutes to explain the model, because only with it as context would any comments about Intel make sense. Ten minutes into my explanation, Grove interrupted: “Look, I've got your model. Just tell us what it means for Intel.”

The powerful motivator in our lives isn't money; it's the opportunity to learn, grow in responsibilities, contribute to others, and be recognized for achievements.

Editor's Note

When the members of the class of 2010 entered business school, the economy was strong and their post-graduation ambitions could be limitless. Just a few weeks later, the economy went into a tailspin. They've spent the past two years recalibrating their worldview and their definition of success.

The students seem highly aware of how the world has changed (as the sampling of views in this article shows). In the spring, Harvard Business School's graduating class asked HBS professor Clay Christensen to address them—but not on how to apply his principles and thinking to their post-HBS careers. The students wanted to know how to apply them to their personal lives. He shared with them a set of guidelines that have helped him find meaning in his own life. Though Christensen's thinking comes from his deep religious faith, we believe that these are strategies anyone can use. And so we asked him to share them with the readers of HBR.

I insisted that I needed 10 more minutes to describe how the process of disruption had worked its way through a very different industry, steel, so that he and his team could understand how disruption worked. I told the story of how Nucor and other steel minimills had begun by attacking the lowest end of the market—steel reinforcing bars, or rebar—and later moved up toward the high end, undercutting the traditional steel mills.

When I finished the minimill story, Grove said, "OK, I get it. What it means for Intel is..." and then went on to articulate what would become the company's strategy for going to the bottom of the market to launch the Celeron processor.

I've thought about that a million times since. If I had been suckered into telling Andy Grove what he should think about the microprocessor business, I'd have been killed. But instead of telling him what to think, I taught him how to think—and then he reached what I felt was the correct decision on his own.

That experience had a profound influence on me. When people ask what I think they should do, I rarely answer their question directly. Instead, I run the question aloud through one of my models. I'll describe how the process in the model worked its way through an industry quite different from their own. And then, more often than not, they'll say, "OK, I get it." And they'll answer their own question more insightfully than I could have.

My class at HBS is structured to help my students understand what good management theory is and how it is built. To that backbone I attach different

models or theories that help students think about the various dimensions of a general manager's job in stimulating innovation and growth. In each session we look at one company through the lenses of those theories—using them to explain how the company got into its situation and to examine what managerial actions will yield the needed results.

On the last day of class, I ask my students to turn those theoretical lenses on themselves, to find cogent answers to three questions: First, how can I be sure that I'll be happy in my career? Second, how can I be sure that my relationships with my spouse and my family become an enduring source of happiness? Third, how can I be sure I'll stay out of jail? Though the last question sounds lighthearted, it's not. Two of the 32 people in my Rhodes scholar class spent time in jail. Jeff Skilling of Enron fame was a classmate of mine at HBS. These were good guys—but something in their lives sent them off in the wrong direction.

As the students discuss the answers to these questions, I open my own life to them as a case study of sorts, to illustrate how they can use the theories from our course to guide their life decisions.

One of the theories that gives great insight on the first question—how to be sure we find happiness in our careers—is from Frederick Herzberg, who asserts that the powerful motivator in our lives isn't money; it's the opportunity to learn, grow in responsibilities, contribute to others, and be recognized for achievements. I tell the students about a vision of sorts I had while I was running the company I founded before becoming an academic. In my mind's eye I saw one of my managers leave for work one



morning with a relatively strong level of self-esteem. Then I pictured her driving home to her family 10 hours later, feeling unappreciated, frustrated, underutilized, and demeaned. I imagined how profoundly her lowered self-esteem affected the way she interacted with her children. The vision in my mind then fast-forwarded to another day, when she drove home with greater self-esteem—feeling that she had learned a lot, been recognized for achieving valuable things, and played a significant role in the success of some important initiatives. I then imagined how positively that affected her as a spouse and a parent. My conclusion: Management is the most noble of professions if it's practiced well. No other occupation offers as many ways to help others learn and grow, take responsibility and be recognized for achievement, and contribute to the success of a team. More and more MBA students come to school thinking that a career in business means buying, selling, and investing in companies. That's unfortunate. Doing deals doesn't yield the deep rewards that come from building up people.

I want students to leave my classroom knowing that.

Create a Strategy for Your Life

A theory that is helpful in answering the second question—How can I ensure that my relationship with my family proves to be an enduring source of happiness?—concerns how strategy is defined and implemented. Its primary insight is that a company's strategy is determined by the types of initiatives that manage-

ment invests in. If a company's resource allocation process is not managed masterfully, what emerges from it can be very different from what management intended. Because companies' decision-making systems are designed to steer investments to initiatives that offer the most tangible and immediate returns, companies shortchange investments in initiatives that are crucial to their long-term strategies.

Over the years I've watched the fates of my HBS classmates from 1979 unfold; I've seen more and more of them come to reunions unhappy, divorced, and alienated from their children. I can guarantee you that not a single one of them graduated with the deliberate strategy of getting divorced and raising children who would become estranged from them. And yet a shocking number of them implemented that strategy. The reason? They didn't keep the purpose of their lives front and center as they decided how to spend their time, talents, and energy.

It's quite startling that a significant fraction of the 900 students that HBS draws each year from the world's best have given little thought to the purpose of their lives. I tell the students that HBS might be one of their last chances to reflect deeply on that question. If they think that they'll have more time and energy to reflect later, they're nuts, because life only gets more demanding: You take on a mortgage; you're working 70 hours a week; you have a spouse and children.

For me, having a clear purpose in my life has been essential. But it was something I had to think long and hard about before I understood it. When I was a Rhodes scholar, I was in a very



Idea in Brief

Good management theory—and practice—can advance your personal life as well as your career.

- To be happy in your business career, understand that the deepest rewards come from investing in people—not companies.
- To make sure your relationship with your family becomes an enduring source of happiness, create a clear purpose for your life; allocate enough resources to achieve it; and take care to deliberately build a culture in your family, just as you would in a corporation.
- To remain ethical, avoid the mistake of adhering to the marginal cost economics of “just this once.”

Doing deals doesn't yield the deep rewards that come from building up people.

demanding academic program, trying to cram an extra year's worth of work into my time at Oxford. I decided to spend an hour every night reading, thinking, and praying about why God put me on this earth. That was a very challenging commitment to keep, because every hour I spent doing that, I wasn't studying applied econometrics. I was conflicted about whether I could really afford to take that time away from my studies, but I stuck with it—and ultimately figured out the purpose of my life.

Had I instead spent that hour each day learning the latest techniques for mastering the problems of autocorrelation in regression analysis, I would have badly misspent my life. I apply the tools of econometrics a few times a year, but I apply my knowledge of the purpose of my life every day. It's the single most useful thing I've ever learned. I promise my students that if they take the time to figure out their life purpose, they'll look back on it as the most important thing they discovered at HBS. If they don't figure it out, they will just sail off without a rudder and get buffeted in the very rough seas of life. Clarity about their purpose will trump knowledge of activity-based costing, balanced scorecards, core competence, disruptive innovation, the four Ps, and the five forces.

My purpose grew out of my religious faith, but faith isn't the only thing that gives people direction. For example, one of my former students decided that his purpose was to bring honesty and economic prosperity to his country and to raise children who were as capably committed to this cause, and to each other, as he was. His purpose is focused on family and others—as mine is.

The choice and successful pursuit of a profession is but one tool for achieving your purpose. But without a purpose, life can become hollow.

Allocate Your Resources

Your decisions about allocating your personal time, energy, and talent ultimately shape your life's strategy.

I have a bunch of “businesses” that compete for these resources: I'm trying to have a rewarding relationship with my wife, raise great kids, contribute to my community, succeed in my career, contribute to my church, and so on. And I have exactly the same problem that a corporation does. I have a limited amount of time and energy and talent. How much do I devote to each of these pursuits?

Allocation choices can make your life turn out to be very different from what you intended. Sometimes that's good: Opportunities that you never planned for emerge. But if you misinvest your resources, the outcome can be bad. As I think about my former classmates who inadvertently invested for lives of hollow unhappiness, I can't help believing that their troubles relate right back to a short-term perspective.

When people who have a high need for achievement—and that includes all Harvard Business School graduates—have an extra half hour of time or an extra ounce of energy, they'll unconsciously allocate it to activities that yield the most tangible accomplishments. And our careers provide the most concrete evidence that we're moving forward. You ship a product, finish a design, complete a presentation, close

a sale, teach a class, publish a paper, get paid, get promoted. In contrast, investing time and energy in your relationship with your spouse and children typically doesn't offer that same immediate sense of achievement. Kids misbehave every day. It's really not until 20 years down the road that you can put your hands on your hips and say, “I raised a good son or a good daughter.” You can neglect your relationship with your spouse, and on a day-to-day basis, it doesn't seem as if things are deteriorating. People who are driven to excel have this unconscious propensity to underinvest in their families and overinvest in their careers—even though intimate and loving relationships with their families are the most powerful and enduring source of happiness.

If you study the root causes of business disasters, over and over you'll find this predisposition toward endeavors that offer immediate gratification. If you look at personal lives through that lens, you'll see the same stunning and sobering pattern: people allocating fewer and fewer resources to the things they would have once said mattered most.

Create a Culture

There's an important model in our class called the Tools of Cooperation, which basically says that being a visionary manager isn't all it's cracked up to be. It's one thing to see into the foggy future with acuity and chart the course corrections that the company must make. But it's quite another to persuade employees who might not see the changes ahead to line up and work cooperatively to take the company in that new direction.



Reflections from the Harvard Business School Class of 2010

"I came to business school knowing exactly what I wanted to do—and I'm leaving choosing the exact opposite. I've worked in the private sector all my life, because everyone always told me that's where smart people are. But I've decided to try government and see if I can find more meaning there."

— **Ruhana Hafiz**

Her plans: To join the FBI as a special advisor (a management track position)

"Because I'm returning to McKinsey, it probably seems like not all that much has changed for me. But while I was at HBS, I decided to do the dual degree at the Kennedy School. With the elections in 2008 and the economy looking shaky, it seemed more compelling for me to get a better understanding of the public and nonprofit sectors. In a way, that drove my return to McKinsey, where I'll have the ability to explore private, public, and nonprofit sectors."

"The recession has made us step back and take stock of how lucky we are. The crisis to us is 'Are we going to have a job by April?' Crisis to a lot of people is 'Are we going to stay in our home?'"

— **John Coleman**

His plans: To return to McKinsey & Company

"You could see a shift happening at HBS. Money used to be number one in the job search. When you make a ton of money, you want more of it. Ironic thing. You start to forget what the drivers of happiness are and what things are really important. A lot of people on campus see money differently now. They think, 'What's the minimum I need to have, and what else drives my life?' instead of 'What's the place where I can get the maximum of both?'"

— **Patrick Chun**

His plans: To join Bain Capital

"The financial crisis helped me realize that you have to do what you really love in life. My current vision of success is based on the impact I can have, the experiences I can gain, and the happiness I can find personally, much more so than the pursuit of money or prestige. My main motivations are (1) to be with my family and people I care about; (2) to do something fun, exciting, and impactful; and (3) to pursue a long-term career in entrepreneurship, where I can build companies that change the way the world works."

— **Matt Salzberg**

His plans: To work for Bessemer Venture Partners

Knowing what tools to wield to elicit the needed cooperation is a critical managerial skill.

The theory arrays these tools along two dimensions—the extent to which members of the organization agree on what they want from their participation in the enterprise, and the extent to which they agree on what actions will produce the desired results. When there is little agreement on both axes, you have to use “power tools”—coercion, threats, punishment, and so on—to secure cooperation. Many companies start in this quadrant, which is why the founding executive team must play such an assertive role in defining what must be done and how. If employees' ways of working together to address those tasks succeed over and over, consensus begins to form. MIT's Edgar Schein has described this process as the mechanism by which a culture is built. Ultimately, people don't even think about whether their way of doing things yields success. They embrace priorities and follow procedures by instinct and assumption rather than by explicit decision—which means that they've created a culture. Culture, in compelling but unspoken ways, dictates the proven, acceptable methods by which members of the group address recurrent problems. And culture defines the priority given to different types of problems. It can be a powerful management tool.

In using this model to address the question, How can I be sure that my family becomes an enduring source of happiness?, my students quickly see that the simplest tools that parents can wield to elicit cooperation from children are power tools. But there comes a point

If your attitude is that only smarter people have something to teach you, your learning opportunities will be very limited.

during the teen years when power tools no longer work. At that point parents start wishing that they had begun working with their children at a very young age to build a culture at home in which children instinctively behave respectfully toward one another, obey their parents, and choose the right thing to do. Families have cultures, just as companies do. Those cultures can be built consciously or evolve inadvertently.

If you want your kids to have strong self-esteem and confidence that they can solve hard problems, those qualities won't magically materialize in high school. You have to design them into your family's culture—and you have to think about this very early on. Like employees, children build self-esteem by doing things that are hard and learning what works.

Avoid the “Marginal Costs” Mistake

We're taught in finance and economics that in evaluating alternative investments, we should ignore sunk and fixed costs, and instead base decisions on the marginal costs and marginal revenues that each alternative entails. We learn in our course that this doctrine biases companies to leverage what they have put in place to succeed in the past, instead of guiding them to create the capabilities they'll need in the future. If we knew the future would be exactly the same as the past, that approach would be fine. But if the future's different—and it almost always is—then it's the wrong thing to do.

This theory addresses the third question I discuss with my students—how

to live a life of integrity (stay out of jail). Unconsciously, we often employ the marginal cost doctrine in our personal lives when we choose between right and wrong. A voice in our head says, “Look, I know that as a general rule, most people shouldn't do this. But in this particular extenuating circumstance, just this once, it's OK.” The marginal cost of doing something wrong “just this once” always seems alluringly low. It suckers you in, and you don't ever look at where that path ultimately is headed and at the full costs that the choice entails. Justification for infidelity and dishonesty in all their manifestations lies in the marginal cost economics of “just this once.”

I'd like to share a story about how I came to understand the potential damage of “just this once” in my own life. I played on the Oxford University varsity basketball team. We worked our tails off and finished the season undefeated. The guys on the team were the best friends I've ever had in my life. We got to the British equivalent of the NCAA tournament—and made it to the final four. It turned out the championship game was scheduled to be played on a Sunday. I had made a personal commitment to God at age 16 that I would never play ball on Sunday. So I went to the coach and explained my problem. He was incredulous. My teammates were, too, because I was the starting center. Every one of the guys on the team came to me and said, “You've got to play. Can't you break the rule just this one time?”

I'm a deeply religious man, so I went away and prayed about what I should do. I got a very clear feeling that I shouldn't break my commitment—so I didn't play in the championship game.

In many ways that was a small decision—involving one of several thousand Sundays in my life. In theory, surely I could have crossed over the line just that one time and then not done it again. But looking back on it, resisting the temptation whose logic was “In this extenuating circumstance, just this once, it's OK” has proven to be one of the most important decisions of my life. Why? My life has been one unending stream of extenuating circumstances. Had I crossed the line that one time, I would have done it over and over in the years that followed.

The lesson I learned from this is that it's easier to hold to your principles 100% of the time than it is to hold to them 98% of the time. If you give in to “just this once,” based on a marginal cost analysis, as some of my former classmates have done, you'll regret where you end up. You've got to define for yourself what you stand for and draw the line in a safe place.

Remember the Importance of Humility

I got this insight when I was asked to teach a class on humility at Harvard College. I asked all the students to describe the most humble person they knew. One characteristic of these humble people stood out: They had a high level of self-esteem. They knew who they were, and they felt good about who they were. We also decided that humility was defined not by self-deprecating behavior or attitudes but by the esteem with which you regard others. Good behavior flows naturally from that kind of humility. For example, you would never steal



from someone, because you respect that person too much. You'd never lie to someone, either.


It's crucial to take a sense of humility into the world. By the time you make it to a top graduate school, almost all your learning has come from people who are smarter and more experienced than you: parents, teachers, bosses. But once you've finished at Harvard Business School or any other top academic institution, the vast majority of people you'll interact with on a day-to-day basis may not be smarter than you. And if your attitude is that only smarter people have something to teach you, your learning opportunities will be very limited. But if you have a humble eagerness to learn something from everybody, your learning opportunities will be unlimited. Generally, you can be humble only if you feel really good about yourself—and you want to help those around you feel really good about themselves, too. When we see people acting in an abusive, arrogant, or demeaning manner toward others, their behavior almost always is a symptom of their lack of self-esteem. They need to put someone else down to feel good about themselves.

Choose the Right Yardstick

This past year I was diagnosed with cancer and faced the possibility that my life would end sooner than I'd planned. Thankfully, it now looks as if I'll be spared. But the experience has given me important insight into my life.

I have a pretty clear idea of how my ideas have generated enormous revenue for companies that have used my research; I know I've had a substan-

tial impact. But as I've confronted this disease, it's been interesting to see how unimportant that impact is to me now. I've concluded that the metric by which God will assess my life isn't dollars but the individual people whose lives I've touched.

I think that's the way it will work for us all. Don't worry about the level of individual prominence you have achieved; worry about the individuals you have helped become better people. This is my final recommendation: Think about the metric by which your life will be judged, and make a resolution to live every day so that in the end, your life will be judged a success. 

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SET BOUNDARIES

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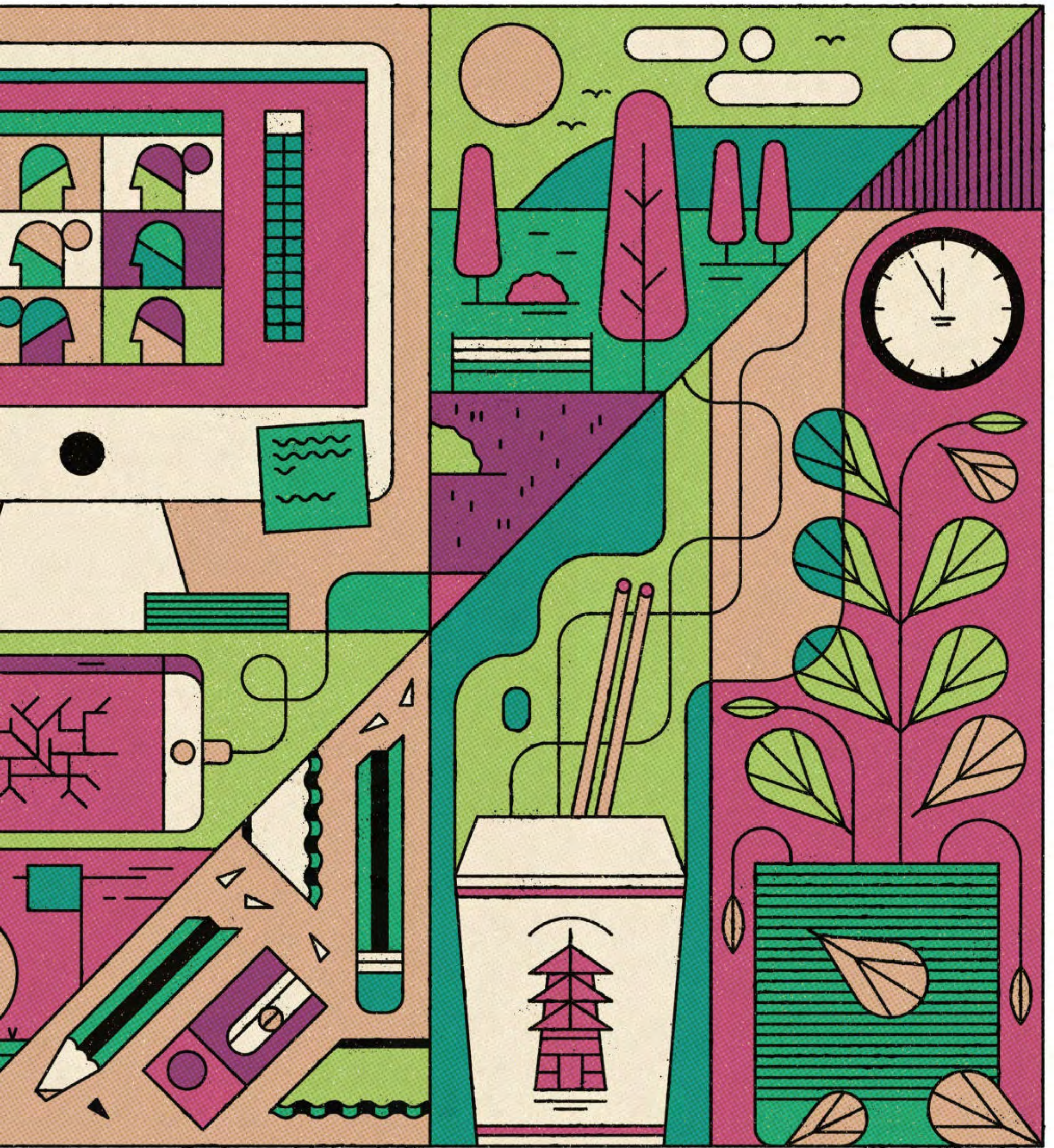
Beating Burnout

→ by MONIQUE VALCOUR

HEAVY WORKLOADS AND DEADLINE PRESSURES are a fact of managerial life. Who doesn't feel overwhelmed or stretched thin sometimes? But when relentless work stress pushes you into the debilitating state we call burnout, it is a serious problem, affecting not just your own performance and well-being, both on the job and off, but also that of your team and your organization.

Hard data on the prevalence of burnout is elusive since it's not yet a clinical term separate from stress. Some researchers say that as few as 7% of professionals have been seriously impacted by burnout. But others have documented rates as high as 50% among medical residents and 85% among financial professionals. A 2013 ComPsych survey of more than 5,100 North American workers found that 62% felt high levels of stress, loss of control, and extreme fatigue. Research







has also linked burnout to many negative physical and mental health outcomes, including coronary artery disease, hypertension, sleep disturbances, depression, and anxiety, as well as to increased alcohol and drug use. Moreover, burnout has been shown to produce feelings of futility and alienation, undermine the quality of relationships, and diminish long-term career prospects.

Consider the case of Barbara (last name withheld), the CEO of a PR firm that serves technology industry clients. During the 2001 collapse of the dot-com bubble, the challenge of keeping her business afloat added extra stress to an already intense workload. Focused on this “unrelenting hustle,” she neglected her health, lost perspective, and began to doubt her own abilities. Cheryl (not her real name), a partner in the Philadelphia office of a global law firm, hit the same sort of wall after she agreed to take on multiple leadership roles there in addition to managing her full-time legal practice. “I felt like my body was running on adrenaline—trying to do a marathon at a sprint pace—all the time,” she recalls. And yet she couldn’t step back mentally from work. Another executive I know—let’s call him Ari—felt trapped in his role as a consultant at a boutique firm. Toxic internal dynamics and client relationship practices that clashed with his values had eroded his sense of self to the point where he didn’t know how to go on—or get out.

Over the past 15 years as a coach, researcher, and educator, I’ve helped thousands of clients, students, and executive-development program participants in similar predicaments learn to manage the stress that can cause burnout and

to ultimately achieve more-sustainable career success. The process involves noticing and acknowledging the symptoms, examining the underlying causes, and developing preventive strategies to counteract your particular pattern of burnout.

Three Components

Thanks to the pioneering research of psychologist Christina Maslach and several collaborators, we know that burnout is a three-component syndrome that arises in response to chronic stressors on the job. Let’s examine each symptom—exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy—in turn.

Exhaustion is the central symptom of burnout. It comprises profound physical, cognitive, and emotional fatigue that undermines people’s ability to work effectively and feel positive about what they’re doing. This can stem from the demands of an always-on, 24/7 organizational culture, intense time pressure, or simply having too much to do, especially when you lack control over your work, dislike it, or don’t have the necessary skills to accomplish it. In a state of exhaustion, you find that you’re unable to concentrate or see the big picture; even routine and previously enjoyable tasks seem arduous, and it becomes difficult to drag yourself both into and out of the office. This is how burnout started for Cheryl. Her fuel tank was low, and it wasn’t being adequately replenished.

Cynicism, also called depersonalization, represents an erosion of engagement. It is essentially a way of distancing yourself psychologically

from your work. Instead of feeling invested in your assignments, projects, colleagues, customers, and other collaborators, you feel detached, negative, even callous. Cynicism can be the result of work overload, but it is also likely to occur in the presence of high conflict, unfairness, and lack of participation in decision-making. For example, after ignoring repeated directives to push solutions that didn’t solve clients’ problems, Ari realized that the constant battle with his bosses was affecting his own behavior. “I was talking trash and shading the truth more often than I was being respectful and honest,” he explains. Persistent cynicism is a signal that you have lost your connection to, enjoyment of, and pride in your work.

Inefficacy refers to feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement and productivity. People with this symptom of burnout feel their skills slipping and worry that they won’t be able to succeed in certain situations or accomplish certain tasks. It often develops in tandem with exhaustion and cynicism because people can’t perform at their peak when they’re out of fuel and have lost their connection to work. For example, although Barbara was a seasoned PR professional, the stress of the dot-com crisis and her resulting fatigue caused her to question her ability to serve clients and keep the business thriving. But burnout can also start with inefficacy if you lack the resources and support to do your job well, including adequate time, information, clear expectations, autonomy, and good relationships with those whose involvement you need to succeed. The absence of feedback and meaningful recogni-

■ Changes at the job, team, or organizational level are often required to address all the underlying issues.

tion, which leaves you wondering about the quality of your work and feeling that it's unappreciated, can also activate this component. This was the situation for Ari, who felt that he was forced to function at a subpar level because his organization didn't care enough to support good performance.

While each component is correlated with the other two and one often leads to another, individuals also have distinct burnout profiles. Michael Leiter, a longtime collaborator with Maslach, is examining this in his current research. He has found, for example, that some people are mainly exhausted but haven't yet developed cynicism or begun to doubt their performance. Others are primarily cynical or suffer most from feelings of reduced efficacy. People can also be high on two components and low on one. Although most of the prevention and recovery strategies we'll discuss are designed to address all three symptoms, it's a good idea to diagnose your specific burnout profile so that you know where you need the most help.

Recovery and Prevention

Situational factors are the biggest contributors to burnout, so changes at the job, team, or organizational level are often required to address all the underlying issues. However, there are steps you can take on your own once you're aware of the symptoms and of what might be causing them. Here are some strategies I have found to be successful with my clients.

Prioritize self-care. It's essential to replenish your physical and emotional energy, along with your capacity to focus,

by prioritizing good sleep habits, nutrition, exercise, social connection, and practices that promote equanimity and well-being, like meditating, journaling, and enjoying nature. If you're having troubling squeezing such activities into your packed schedule, give yourself a week to assess exactly how you're spending your time. (You can do this on paper, in a spreadsheet, or on one of the many relevant apps now available.) For each block of time, record what you're doing, whom you're with, how you feel (for example, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 equals angry or drained and 10 is joyful or energized), and how valuable the activity is. This will help you find opportunities to limit your exposure to tasks, people, and situations that aren't essential and put you in a negative mood; increase your investment in those that boost your energy; and make space for restful, positive time away from work.

Barbara says she bounced back from her bout of burnout by "learning to do things that fill me up." Nowadays, when she notices that she's feeling overly tired or starting to doubt herself, she changes her behavior immediately, making use of flexible work options, hosting walking meetings to get out of the office, and setting limits on the amount of time she spends reading e-mails and taking calls from colleagues and clients.

After her crisis, Cheryl also became much more intentional about her time off. "I find that going away, getting a change of scenery, and 'taking it down a notch' allows my body and mind to rejuvenate," she says. "And my creativity benefits: I have more 'aha' moments, and I'm better able to connect the dots."



Idea in Brief

MANAGERS IN CRISIS

Demanding workloads and deadlines may be par for the course, but unremitting work stress can lead to burnout—a debilitating state that can affect your performance and well-being, both at work and at home, as well as impact your team and organization.

ROAD MAP FOR RECOVERY

The key to preventing—or recovering from—burnout starts with identifying symptoms and what might be causing them. Then use strategies such as prioritizing self-care, examining your mindset and assumptions, reducing your exposure to job stressors, and seeking out meaningful work connections to avoid being overwhelmed.

BETTER WORK, BETTER LIFE

That sense of being inundated with stress is a red flag, not the final outcome. Understanding the symptoms of burnout and implementing strategies to recover from and prevent it can help you create a sustainable career and find health and happiness in your life.



Help Prevent Burnout on Your Team

Burnout is rarely an individual phenomenon; fixing and preventing it requires leadership. You can help your team thrive by implementing the following advice.

Watch for Warning Signs

- The signs of burnout are obvious in some people but subtle in others. Keep an eye out for tiredness, lack of focus, depressed mood, hostility, and expressions of hopelessness.
- Regularly check in with team members to gauge their physical, cognitive, and emotional energy levels.

Set Limits on Workloads

- Talk to your team about its collective capacity, and ensure that assignments and deadlines don't exceed it.
- Shield your team from external pressures, including unreasonable or unclear client and management demands.

Insist on Renewal

- Communicate that optimal performance depends on rest and renewal. Encourage people to set sensible limits on work hours.
- Set an example by keeping reasonable hours yourself.

- Make sure your team members take their full vacation time.

Boost Control

- Clarify expectations; grant flexibility on where, when, and how people get work done.
- Advocate for the resources your team needs to perform.
- Create uninterrupted time for people to make progress on important tasks.

Make Recognition Meaningful

- Regularly highlight wins and successes, even small ones.

- Recognize and reward people for helping others.
- Note the positive impact of your team's work on others.

Emphasize Learning

- Routinely ask team members about their development goals and what resources are required to achieve them.
- Share what you're learning and how you're doing it.

Facilitate Mutual Support

- Talk regularly about progress toward team goals.

- At team meetings, ask what assistance people need and can offer one another.
- Be open about asking for and giving support.

Build Community

- Don't tolerate incivility on your team. Set an example for respectful, compassionate behavior toward others.
- Encourage people to share what's happening in their lives outside of work.

Shift your perspective. While rest, relaxation, and replenishment can ease exhaustion, curb cynicism, and enhance efficacy, they don't fully address the root causes of burnout. Back at the office, you may still face the same impossible workload, untenable conflicts, or paltry resources. So now you must take a close look at your mindset and assumptions. What aspects of your situation are truly fixed, and which can you change? Altering your perspective can buffer the negative impact of even the inflexible aspects. If exhaustion is a key problem, ask yourself which tasks—including

critical ones—you could delegate to free up meaningful time and energy for other important work. Are there ways to reshape your job in order to gain more control or to focus on the most fulfilling tasks? If cynicism is a major issue, can you shield yourself from the parts of the organization that frustrate you, while reengaging in your specific role and the whole enterprise? Or could you build some positive, supportive relationships to counteract the ones that drain you? And if you're feeling ineffective, what assistance or development might you seek out? If recognition is lacking, could

you engage in some personal branding to showcase your work?

Cheryl worked with an executive coach to evaluate and reset her priorities. "I work in a competitive field and I'm a competitive person, which can skew the way you see reality," she explains. "In the past I didn't dare say no to leadership opportunities because I was afraid that if I did, everything might disappear." She says she's now replaced that "scarcity" mentality with one that instead presumes abundance. "Now if I feel overextended, I'll ask myself, Is there a way to inject joy back into

The best antidote to burnout is seeking out rich interpersonal interactions and continual personal and professional development.

this role, or is it time to give it up? And I understand that when I want to take something on, I need to decide what to give up to make space.”

Ari did the same sort of deep thinking. Although he had previously felt tethered to his job—the firm was prestigious, the pay was good—he realized that values and ethics meant more to him than any perk, so he eventually quit and started his own business. “After I pushed back a couple of times and said that what we were recommending wasn’t right for the clients, my boss cranked up the pressure on me and assigned me to only the most difficult clients. At one point I said to my wife, ‘It might be good if I got hit by a bus. I don’t want to die, but I’d like to be injured enough that I’d have to stop working for a while.’ She said, ‘That’s it; you’re getting out of there.’” He took a few months to line up some independent consulting assignments and then made the move.

Reduce exposure to job stressors. You’ll also need to target high-value activities and relationships that still trigger unhealthy stress. This involves resetting the expectations of colleagues, clients, and even family members for what and how much you’re willing to take on, as well as ground rules for working together. You may get pushback. But doubters must know that you’re making these changes to improve your long-term productivity and protect your health.

Barbara, for example, is keenly aware of the aspects of PR work that put people in her field at risk of burnout, so now she actively manages them. “There’s constant pressure, from both clients and the media,” she explains. “But a lot of times, what clients label a crisis is not ac-


tually one. Part of the job is helping them put things in perspective. And being a good service professional doesn’t mean you have to be a servant. You shouldn’t be e-mailing at 11 at night on a regular basis.”

Cheryl, too, says she’s learned “not to get carried along in the current” of overwhelming demands. She adds, “You have to know when saying no is the right answer. And it takes courage and conviction to stick to your guns and not feel guilty.” If you find that there are few or no opportunities to shift things in a more positive direction, you might want to contemplate a bigger change, as Ari did.

Seek out connections. The best antidote to burnout, particularly when it’s driven by cynicism and inefficacy, is seeking out rich interpersonal interactions and continual personal and professional development. Find coaches and mentors who can help you identify and activate positive relationships and learning opportunities. Volunteering to advise others is another particularly effective way of breaking out of a negative cycle.

Given the influence of situational factors on burnout, it’s likely that others in your organization are suffering too. If you band together to offer mutual support, identify problems, and brainstorm and advocate for solutions, you will all increase your sense of control and connection. Barbara participates in a CEO mentoring and advisory program called Vistage. “We’re a small group of CEOs in noncompetitive businesses, so we can share ideas,” she explains. “We spend one day per month together, have great speakers, and serve as advisory boards for each other.” Ari, now a

successful solo entrepreneur, has built a network of technical partners who share the same vision, collaborate, and funnel work to one another. He says that running a “client centered” business he believes in and working with people he respects have boosted his engagement tremendously.

BURNOUT CAN OFTEN feel insurmountable. But the sense of being overwhelmed is a signal, not a long-term sentence. By understanding the symptoms and causes and implementing these four strategies, you can recover and build a road map for prevention. Your brutal experience can serve as a turning point that launches you into a more sustainable career and a happier, healthier life. 

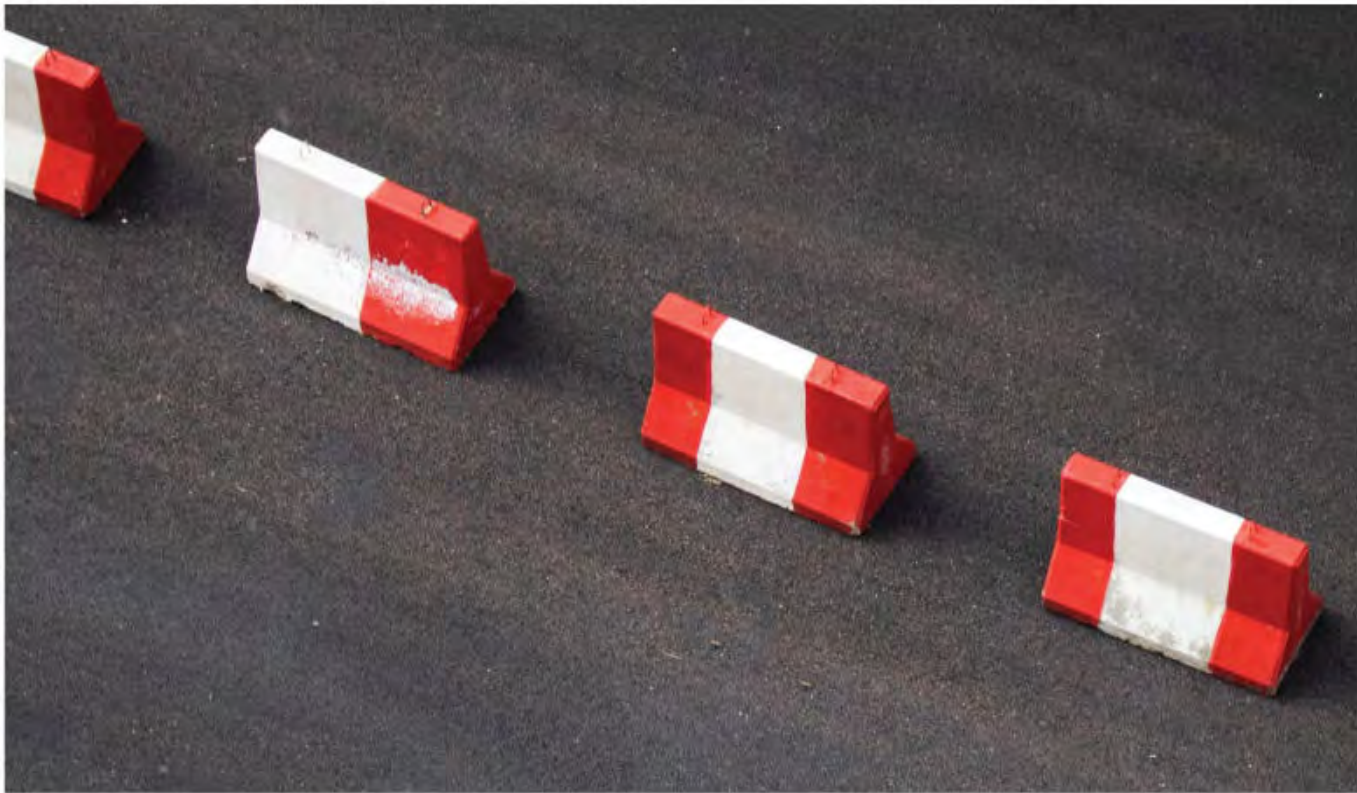
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SET BOUNDARIES

Quick Takes



1. Stop Work Overload by Setting These Boundaries

→ by ELIZABETH GRACE SAUNDERS

WHY IS IT that when your friends, your significant other, and especially your mom tell you, *You need to stop working so much!*—you hesitate? On the one hand, you know they have a point. It's unsustainable to consistently pull 12- to 14-hour days, and you feel burned-out and cranky. But when it comes to actually setting boundaries, you stall and tell yourself and others, "It's just a busy time. It will get better soon."

But, it doesn't. And you find yourself wedged between the fact that you can't seem to get everything done and the feeling that maybe the problem isn't the situation—it's you. You feel guilty that everyone else seems to complete everything, but you can't. You worry that if you ask for help or say no to anything, everyone will discover you're an imposter who doesn't add enough value.

Although those fears are understandable, they aren't necessary valid. As a time coach, I've found that one of the biggest keys to achieving balance is to start objectively evaluating the fact-based aspects of your schedule rather than letting a vague sense of fear drive your decisions. No matter how valuable a team member you may be, no one can fit 100 hours of work into 40 hours a week, or even 60 hours. You can start to

make changes once you have confidence that the expectations of yourself and others really *are* unreasonable and that you can set boundaries in a respectful, constructive manner.

Here are five steps to gain that confidence, which you can apply on an individual level or, if you are responsible for managing your team's expectations, on a group level.

1. Develop a time budget.

People who manage their finances well follow a few consistent principles: (1) They spend only what they have, so they avoid unnecessary debt and the corresponding stress and cost. (2) They make sure they allocate their money correctly so that they have sufficient funds for everything they need to buy. And finally, (3) they cut costs where they can, without a significant negative impact, and put money into investments where they have a good probability of a return. The same principles apply to effective time investment. To have a clear sense of what you can reasonably handle, start out by calculating how many hours you have to "spend" each week. If you tend to overallocate time toward work, you can do the calculations in reverse. For example:

AMER GHAZZAL/GETTY IMAGES

Challenge your assumptions on what you should do and how long you should spend on different activities.

Hours/day to work =
24 - (number of hours of sleep) - (commute) - (personal commitments) - (exercise) - (self-care)

Personal commitments are items in your schedule that are essential to your self-fulfillment, such as family time, volunteer responsibilities, social activities, or personal passions like playing the piano. Eating and showering fall under self-care. After you have a sense of your daily time budget, calculate your weekly time budget by adding up the totals for each day. For some people, each day will look similar. For others, their personal commitments create large variations in their day-to-day time budget.

Once you understand the size of your time budget, then you can evaluate the different time costs during your workday. For example, you have “maintenance” activities like answering email or planning projects, “execution” activities like attending meetings or completing reports, and “development” activities like networking or marketing. Make a list of all the different elements of your workday and then write down either an initial time estimate or a percentage for each one. For instance, I spend 20% of my workday answering email,

50% working on projects, and 30% doing development activities. Consider not only the cost for a particular item but also the associated costs. For instance, a one-hour meeting could come with the related expenses of 15 minutes of travel time each way, 30 minutes of prep, and 15 minutes of follow-up, so the total expense comes to 2.25 hours. If you work a nine-hour day and want to spend no more than 50% of your time in meetings, that limits you to an average of two meetings per day and 10 meetings per week.

2. Make cuts where you can.

After developing a time budget, you’ll typically find that you really did expect more of yourself than you could possibly fit into the hours in a day. But that doesn’t mean it’s time to go running to your manager. Instead, you need to look carefully at how you spend your time and cut where you can first.

One of the readers of my book took this advice to heart when she faced a major time crunch at work. Instead of trying to fight the reality of her time budget, she took this action:

“I was (once again) up against way too many competing projects with the same

deadline and then trying to juggle other ongoing and long-term projects, too, which was causing lots of stress! So, I thought about what was causing the stress and tried to tackle things I had control of without just defaulting to working a lot of overtime. For example, I contacted one of the project managers with the longer-term project to see if it was possible to ‘pause’ my effort on his project over a two-week period, and he agreed, with some negotiations. So that was about 24 hours saved over the two weeks. Then I attacked a few other aspects of the problem by recruiting some more part-time help from another department, adjusting the scope of one project, gaining an extension on another project, etc. Instead of feeling overwhelmed and a victim of the circumstances, I felt SO powerful!”

You may need to take such extreme measures in times of a work crisis, or more-subtle measures, such as excusing yourself from nonessential meetings, asking your colleagues to review items with you during a one-on-one meeting instead of sending you 50 emails throughout the week, stepping off a committee, turning off your email pop-ups, or spending less

time on items where spending more hours to get them perfect doesn’t add value. Challenge your assumptions on what you should do and how long you should spend on different activities. If possible, put tasks on your weekly to-do list only if you have space to fit them into your schedule.

3. Compare expected with actual.

Once you’ve started to accept that time is limited and you’ve taken advantage of the quick wins, you’ll need to further refine your estimates to compare expected with actual time allotments. For instance, maybe you think writing that email should take only one hour, but when you actually track the time you spend, you find that it takes two. (Any sort of tracking will do, but if you want to be precise, tools like RescueTime can help you know exactly how you spend time on your computer.) When faced with the reality of the situation, you’ll need to see if you can take time-cutting measures like writing more-succinct responses, using tools like TypeIt4Me, or requesting different email strategies at work. If none of those reduces the time allocation, you’ll need to increase your budget in that area.

The fact that you're over your time budget isn't a judgment about you but a sign that you need to adjust your overall environment.

Using the 80/20 rule can also help you make everything fit within your time budget. But this will require you to more fully embrace the realization that you can't do everything and please everyone. For example, as you start to look at the value from different activities, you may find that declining meetings that people would *like* you to attend but that keep you from your highest-priority tasks is the solution. Or you may need to spend less time than you might have thought to make the correct amount of impact. For example, spending 30 to 45 minutes at your company's happy hour may have almost as much impact as staying for two hours. By cutting out earlier, you can invest an hour in exercising or finishing a proposal, which will have a dramatic return on the time investment. Although some of these choices may make people uncomfortable—especially you—the short-term discomfort caused by changing your natural default response will have a big payoff in the long term.

4. Ask for direction.

If you've followed the above three steps and still can't accomplish everything you must do, it's time to be brave and ask for help. You can do so in a clear, objective way as

outlined below. But before you do, bolster your confidence by looking over your time budget once more and reminding yourself that you have no reason to feel guilty or like a failure. No one can do the impossible, so the fact that you're over your time budget isn't a judgment about you but a sign that you need to adjust your overall environment.

Here's how to approach time-budget negotiations with your manager and/or people who try to put more items into your schedule:

Gather your facts. Have a concise list of projects and a rough estimate of how long the various tasks take you to do. (If you've followed the above three steps, you should already have this on hand.)

Develop a visual. This could be as simple as printing out your weekly calendar after having filled in time for both meetings and tasks, or as complex as displaying a full-scale project plan. The form matters less than the goal of showing the incongruence between the available time and the requested activities.

Present the information. Instead of seeing this as a battle between you and the people desiring work from you,

approach these negotiations as strategic sessions where you are working together to maximize the value you can contribute. Maybe a task could be demoted in priority, delegated, or simplified so that you have more time to focus on your highest-priority tasks. When done in this manner, asking for direction with setting priorities doesn't have to come across as disrespectful or insubordinate, but as a joint effort to work within the reality of your time limitations.

5. Keep rebalancing.

Due to the dynamic nature of life and work, you can't simply set your schedule and then leave it for the next 10 years. Typically on a daily or weekly (or at the very least monthly) basis, you will need to balance and rebalance your schedule. This means that if you had underallocated time toward a particular activity one week, like reviewing email, you will need to spend more time on it the following week. Or maybe one day you will need to completely focus on presentation prep so that you can catch up on meetings the next day. The realistic goal is to have the allocation of time within your work-week—and between your work and nonwork time—average out correctly.

As a final word of encouragement—and warning—practicing what I've outlined will leave you not only healthier and happier but also more humble. When you start to embrace your limits, you'll need to admit that you aren't perfect and can't do everything, especially all at once. If you have always been your team's go-to perfectionist, adjusting your behavior could leave you feeling a bit at a loss in terms of your identity. You'll need to redefine who you are, such as “the person who remains calm and delivers on-time, quality work” instead of “the stressed-out team member who meets ridiculously short deadlines and never says no.” This transition will take time but ultimately empower you to enjoy the journey and make life more pleasant for those around you, too.

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2. How to Stay Focused When You're Working from Home

→ by ELIZABETH GRACE SAUNDERS

NO COMMUTE. No drive-by meetings. No dress code. Remote working can seem like a dream—until personal obligations get in the way. These distractions are easy to ignore in an office, but at home it can be difficult to draw the line between personal and professional time.

Consider when you're working on a project and get a call from a friend. You know you must finish your work, but you feel rude for not talking when you *technically* could. Or think about when you're planning your daily to-do list, but you also need to decide when you'll

squeeze in your personal commitments. Putting a few loads of laundry in the washer midday can seem like a quick task—until you find yourself making up that work time late at night. In the end, it's never entirely clear when you're really “on” or “off.”

As someone who has worked from home for 12 years and been a time management coach for remote workers, I've seen and experienced the good, the bad, and the ugly. The most focused and effective remote workers set up boundaries for themselves so that they can actually get work done.

Here are some tips for how you can make remote work more productive and satisfying, whether it's an everyday occurrence or an occasional work-from-home day.

Establish working hours.

It may sound silly, but if you want to have a focused day of work, pretend you're not working from home. Before I became a time management coach, my schedule was chaotic. I didn't have a set time that I would be at my computer, and I would often schedule personal appointments or run errands during the day. And since my personal life didn't have boundaries, my work life didn't either. When I was home, I would feel guilty for not checking business email at all hours of the day and night. I never felt as if I could truly rest.

But a big shift occurred when I set up “office hours” for working from home (for me, that was about 9 AM to



6 PM most weekdays) and clarified what was or wasn't acceptable to do during that time. I'd ask myself, "If I was in an office, would I do this task during the day?" If the answer was no, I knew I needed to do the activity before or after office hours. Household chores, errands, and time with friends all became activities that needed to happen before or after work. Sure, I would still field an occasional call from a friend during my lunch break, or if I had an urgent task like an emergency car repair, I'd make it happen during the day. But these were exceptions, not the rule. In setting this boundary, I not only created dedicated work time but also found that I could focus on personal items guilt-free "after hours."

Structure your day for success. Maximize the effectiveness of your time at home by structuring it differently from a typical workday. For example, if you work from home only one day a week or on occasion, make it a meeting-free day. If you can't entirely avoid meetings, reserve at least half a day for focused work. Choose a time that works best for you depending on any required meetings and your energy level.

Then define one or two key items you want to accomplish during this time. These could be tasks that need an hour or more of uninterrupted attention or simply require more-creative, strategic thinking than you can achieve in the office environment. It's also helpful to shut down your email during this period—or at least stay away from it for an hour at a time. Alert colleagues of when you'll be disconnected so that they won't be surprised by a delayed response.

Set boundaries with others. To make your efforts stick, be clear with the people who might see your work-at-home days as simply days you're at home. Explain to friends, family, and other acquaintances that the days you're working remotely aren't opportunities for non-work-related activities. For example, if you're home with your spouse, tell him or her, "I'm planning on being on my computer from 8 AM to 5 PM today. I'm happy to chat at lunch, but other than that I'll be occupied." Typically, when you set expectations and stick to them (say, really stopping at 5 PM), people will understand your limits instead of assuming you'll be available. (I also recommend having a place where you're

away from anyone else who might be home, such as an office or a bedroom where you can shut the door and be out of sight.)

In situations where you may have unexpected visitors, you'll need to be diplomatic. If a neighbor pops by, be open for a conversation for a few minutes, just as you would with a colleague who stops by your desk. But don't suggest she comes in for a cup of coffee, or have an extended discussion. Instead, use a graceful exit line like "It was so wonderful to talk with you, but I've got some work to finish up," and then set a time to meet up after hours or on a weekend. Or, if your landlord says he'd like to stop by to do some repairs, offer a time or day that works best for you rather than letting him take the lead.

If you do need to take on non-work-related requests during the day, set expectations for how much time you have on the basis of what your schedule is like in the office. For example, if your family asks you to run errands, estimate what you can do during a lunch hour, then commit only to that. For instance, say, "I'm happy to pick up some milk at lunch, but I won't have time for full-scale grocery shopping until after work." Or break down

errands into smaller pieces, such as, "I can drop off the car at the mechanic today but won't get to calling about the health insurance question until tomorrow."

When you explain your limits, you don't need to do so apologetically. Lay them out factually, having the same respect for your time working from home that you would have if you were on-site. As you consistently communicate and live by these expectations, other people will begin to expect them, and you'll find yourself having more time for focused work.

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3. Winning Support for Flexible Work

→ by AMY GALLO

MANAGEMENT EXPERTS HAVE long predicted the demise of the standard 9-to-5 workday. Thanks to internet and mobile technology, we can now work where and when we want, they argue. So, why are so many people still sticking to those traditional hours, or more likely an extended version of them? The reality is that while flexible work arrangements have become more popular, few companies have an official policy or program. And even fewer managers are open to or equipped to handle employees with alternative schedules. But

this doesn't mean you should give up on the idea of work flexibility. It just means the onus is on you to propose a plan that works for you, your boss, and your company.

What the Experts Say

Before you pursue a flexible schedule, recognize that you are likely to be bucking long-held conventions. "Traditionally, managers were reluctant to have people work remotely because of lack of trust: Are you really working, or are you eating

bonbons with your friend?" explains Stewart D. Friedman, professor of management at the Wharton School and the founding director of the Wharton School's Leadership Program and Wharton's Work/Life Integration Project. Even those bosses who trust their employees worry about appearing to favor certain people or allowing productivity to decline.

Still, more managers and organizations are seeing the benefits of nontraditional schedules. Research from Lotte Bailyn, professor of management at MIT's Sloan

School of Management and a coauthor, with Rhona Rapoport, Joyce Fletcher, and Bettye Pruitt, of *Beyond Work-Family Balance: Advancing Gender Equity and Workplace Performance* (Jossey-Bass, 2001), has shown that when people are given the flexibility they need, they meet goals more easily, they're absent or tardy less often, and their morale goes up. By focusing on these upsides and framing your request correctly, you greatly increase your chances of getting approval for an alternative work arrangement.

Define what you want.

The first step is to figure out what you are trying to accomplish. Spend more time with family? Reduce the amount of time you spend at the office? Remove distractions so that you can focus on long-term projects? Once you're clear on your goal, decide what arrangement will best help you achieve it—options include having a compressed workweek, job sharing, reducing your hours, working from home, taking a monthlong sabbatical, even something as simple as turning off your smartphone in the evenings—and consider whether you could still do your job effectively. Of course, not every job is suited



for flexibility. Before you make a proposal, be sure to understand the impact your wished-for schedule will have on your boss, your team, and your performance.

Next, investigate what policies, if any, your company has and whether there is a precedent for flexibility. There's no need to blaze a trail that's already been blazed. If your company doesn't have a formal policy, you'll need to create a proposal yourself.

Design it as an experiment. Many managers will be hesitant, especially if your organization does not have established protocols. You can allay their fears by positioning your proposal as an experiment. "Include a trial period so that the boss doesn't worry that things will fall apart. He or she needs to be able to see the new way of working, and in our experience, it quickly becomes evident that it is superior," says Bailyn. In Friedman's book *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life* (Harvard Business School Press, 2008), he talks about nine different types of experiments—everything from working remotely to delegating—you can use to gently introduce flexibility into your work life. Most important,

provide an out for you and your boss. Explain that if it doesn't work, you are willing to try a different arrangement or go back to the way things were. "If things go wrong, one can always go back to the original plan, but most such experiments work out very well," says Bailyn.

Ask for team input and support. "Lots of our research has shown that flexibility only works when it's done collectively, not one-on-one between employee and employer," says Bailyn. Remember that your team—peers and direct reports—is affected by your work schedule, so you need everyone's support to make your new arrangement a success. Explain what you are trying to achieve and ask for their input. "Engage them in the planning and proposal," Bailyn says, and be sure to let your boss know that your proposal includes your colleagues' suggestions.

Involving your team can help head off another common concern of bosses. Some worry that if they grant one person flexibility, the floodgates will open and everyone will want the same arrangement. This is often an unfounded fear. Friedman points out that there's a difference between "equality"

and "equity," and, in fact, many people prefer a traditional schedule. "You don't give everyone the same thing because they don't want the same thing," he says.

Highlight the benefits to the organization. Your proposal needs to emphasize the organizational benefits over the personal ones. "Whatever you try has to be designed very consciously to not just be about you or your family," Friedman says. "Instead, what you propose needs to have the clear goal of improving your performance at work and making your boss successful." Demonstrate that you have considered the company's needs and that your new schedule will not be disruptive and will actually have positive benefits, such as improving your productivity or increasing your relevant knowledge.

Reassess and make adjustments. After your experiment has been in place for three or four months, evaluate its success. Are you reaching your goals? Is the schedule causing problems for anyone? Because you've designed the arrangement as a trial, you will want to report back to your boss. "Get the data to support your productivity. Show that it's working,"

says Friedman. And if it's not, be prepared to suggest adjustments.

Principles to Remember

Do:

- Know what you are trying to accomplish with flexibility before proposing an alternative schedule
- Acknowledge the impact your arrangement will have on your boss, your team, and your productivity
- Start with an experiment, and be open to adjustments if it doesn't work out

Don't:

- Focus exclusively on the benefits to you and your family
- Assume your team will be behind you; you must incorporate their input and suggestions
- Propose anything as a permanent solution without testing it first

CASE STUDY 1

Creating a Unique Job Share

Julie Rocco was working as a program manager at Ford Motor Company when she had her first baby. She knew she wanted to return after her maternity leave, but she didn't see how she could work a 12-hours-a-day job and also be a hands-on mom.

Start with an experiment, and be open to adjustments if it doesn't work out.

So she asked a mentor at Ford for advice. The answer was simple: Take advantage of the company's commitment to flexible work by crafting a job that suited her. The mentor suggested she talk to another Julie at Ford, Julie Levine, about job sharing. Levine, a mother of two, had shared a job before and wanted to try it again, not least because it would give her an opportunity to move into mainstream project development.

"It's very much like picking a spouse," Levine says of choosing the right job-share partner. "That person is your eyes and ears when you're not there." After checking each other out in what they now call "a blind date," they agreed to pitch themselves as a pair to Ford's management. The plan was this: Each would work three days a week overlapping one day—Rocco on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday; Levine on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. They deliberately opted against splitting the week in half to avoid "losing momentum" during long stretches away. Each evening, save Wednesday, the person who'd been in the office would spend an hour and a half on the phone "downloading" the day's events to the one who'd been home. And on their days in

common, they would either work together or, when things were exceptionally busy, divide and conquer. "It's our job to be seamless," they told their bosses. "We have the same outlook, the same goal, the same vision, the same work ethic. And you'll get more from us than one person could give."

"We said we would be a pilot," Levine recalls. Not only did Ford's management agree, they put the duo in charge of one of their most high-profile 2011 launches—the new Ford Explorer. The experiment was a success: They're now known throughout the company as "the two Julies," twin dynamos.

Both say the job share has made them happier at home and work, and also more effective. "One person might work a 12-hour day, go home and collapse, then have to do it all again the next day," Levine explains. "With us, because you have to analyze your day and share it with another brain, when you show up the next day, you're ready to run."

CASE STUDY 2

Taking Time Off for Personal Development

Amit Desai had been working at Bayer HealthCare for 11 years when he decided he wanted to apply to Wharton's

top-rated executive MBA program. However, his enrollment would mean attending a full day of school on Friday every other week and on occasional Thursdays for two years—more than 60 days away from his job as an automation project manager.

While Bayer has official policies on telecommuting and flextime, special requests like Amit's are decided on a case-by-case basis, so he was told to make a formal proposal. He started by looking into a similar request a previous employee had made and talking to his boss, who supported the plan with one stipulation: If a conflict ever arose, Amit would give priority to work over school. Amit agreed and created a pitch, including a detailed explanation of the MBA program and his goals in applying, a calendar of days he would be in school and how they tied into his work schedule, and a list of benefits to Bayer. "I have the ability to apply knowledge gained at school over the weekend to work on Monday," he told them. The vice president approved his request and wrote a letter endorsing his Wharton application.

Amit is now in his fifth semester. "I honestly feel that the MBA challenge has reju-

venated me, and I am more energized [at work]," he says.

CASE STUDY 3

Setting the Precedent

Like many young parents, Hope O'Reilly and her husband, Troy, were shocked to discover how prohibitively expensive full-time childcare was, especially in New York City. After having their first child, Hope wanted to return to her job as director of development at the American Craft Council (ACC), but she and Troy weren't sure how they could swing it financially. Toward the end of her maternity leave, the couple came up with a plan that would allow them both to continue working full-time while reducing their need for childcare: Each person would work from home one day a week, so they would need a sitter only on three days. They would be available for calls and meetings at most hours, work while the baby napped, and make up for any missed time on their four days in the office.

Troy was a vice president in technology at JPMorgan Chase, and because the bank had flexible work policies in place, he was able to get approval to work from home most Mondays rather easily. Hope asked her boss at the ACC if she could work from



home on Fridays but faced a bigger challenge since no one at the organization had done that before. “There was absolutely no precedent,” she says. Her boss was concerned about whether the mother of a newborn could really work at home, but Hope reassured her she could and promised to put in extra hours on nights and weekends. She acknowledged that it would be challenging and suggested they try the arrangement for three months, after which they could reevaluate.

Hope stayed in the job, working from home on Fridays, for two years before moving on to the Bogliasco Foundation, where she has a similar arrangement working a compressed workweek. She believes that flexibility garners loyalty in employees. “When you have flexibility, you let a lot of other things slide, such as not getting raises. What’s more valuable than time?” she says.

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4. Building Work/Life Boundaries in the WFH Era

How to help yourself—and your employees—find time and space to be productive.

→ by NANCY P. ROTHBARD

REMOTE WORK USED to be an option for those employees who could convince their manager that it was a good idea. All that changed with the arrival of Covid-19.

For many, the transition to remote work has been remarkably smooth, aided by technologies such as fast

internet, smartphones, and video- and audio-based conferencing. Yet the technologies that have made remote work possible have also created a more permeable boundary between work and family roles. In many cases, employees must attend to email, Slack, and video

meetings alongside family members who are also working or learning from home. Compounding this change is the fact that working from home was mandated seemingly overnight for many knowledge workers, rather than a thought-out plan that employees could adequately

MARIYAN ATANASOV

Integrators tend to blur work-family boundaries; segmentors strive to preserve clear ones.

prepare for or opt into at their discretion. All of this makes it more difficult to psychologically detach and recover from work, and creates a need to more actively manage boundaries between work and family.

Much of my research over the past 20 years looks at how we form and manage boundaries between different parts of our lives. As many knowledge workers and their managers face more months of remote work, it's vital to understand how you and your employees navigated work-family boundaries in more traditional office environments—and how mandatory working from home affects these approaches. Only then can you begin structuring remote work that not only is productive but honors everyone's boundaries over the long term.

Integrators and Segmentors in the Office

Back when you worked at an office, maybe your family dropped by to visit you or you regularly took work home. Or you may have tried to separate home and family, taking work-related calls at work and family-related calls at home. These preferences—known as integration and segmen-

tation—are key factors in the ways we navigate our daily boundaries. Integrators, as the first example above demonstrates, tend to blur work-family boundaries; segmentors, on the other hand, strive to preserve clear ones.

Generally speaking, there are two key dimensions that integrators and segmentors have to navigate: time and space. Understanding these dimensions will give you an idea of which category you fall in.

Time. Integrators tend to be comfortable performing work tasks during “family time” and doing family tasks during “work time.” They often work after office hours and take care of personal matters, such as paying bills or making doctor appointments, during work time. A strong integrator might take work calls in the evenings when they are at home but also makes sure to show up at a family story hour at 10 AM, even though it's during typical work hours.

In contrast, segmentors strive to focus on work during work hours and on family during family time. A strong segmentor aims to finish up work calls while at work, even if it means staying a bit later, and might only participate in a family story hour during a lunch break.

My research, conducted with Tracy Dumas and the late Katherine Phillips, also shows that segmentors are happier and more committed when they have access to flextime, as this allows them to block their time in a way that preserves a clear distinction between work and family.

Space. Integrators tend to be more comfortable blurring spatial boundaries. They are more apt to work from home, and, when they do work at the office, they're more likely to display pictures of their family members. Indeed, my research shows that integrators are happier and more committed to the organization when they have access to workplace practices that bridge the spatial divide, such as on-site childcare. Segmentors, however, like to keep these spaces separate. They sometimes split work and home by having different calendars and even key chains for each domain. While they are less likely to have a home office to begin with, if segmentors are required to do so, they're likely to need a physical barrier between work and home, like a room with a door.

Broadly, these time and space differences also mean that integrators are more

likely to experience distractions and interruptions, given that they tend to allow work and family activities to coincide. Segmentors, however, are often able to focus more deeply on whatever task is a priority, because they preserve a sharper boundary between work and home. That said, integrators have an easier time transitioning between different roles compared with segmentors—and that was true even before Covid-19.

How, then, do the characteristics and needs of both working styles change when employees are required to work from home? I see some new challenges both work types face today and offer some practical ways to address them.

Integrators and Segmentors in the Age of Covid-19

Today, segmentors' strong desire to keep their office and family lives separate is almost impossible to satisfy while working from home. For integrators, the sudden and fully immersive blurring of work and home boundaries can be difficult if they've never felt the need to separate work and home in the past but might have to now. Here are ways that both segmentors

Scheduling virtual “watercooler” time provides an opportunity for team members to check in with and get to know one another better.

and integrators—and their managers—need to reconsider both time and space.

Time. Putting boundaries around your time is important regardless of whether you are an integrator or a segmentor. This might come easier to segmentors, who crave clear boundaries. Integrators might have to work harder at this skill by creating more schedules and routines.

In particular, sticking to a schedule of predetermined working hours will be important for segmentors to feel in control of their work life, especially when they are surrounded by the reminders of family when working from home. However, it’s still important to recognize that any predetermined schedule may need to be modified on the basis of your responsibilities in caring for family members. Negotiating “work” hours with your family and your coworkers—and sticking to them—will help you stay on track and feel better about working from home.

A second technique that may help segmentors fulfill their need for a clear boundary is to dress for work. This might look more like a casual Friday in the office, not pajamas and sweats. This will help you separate and feel like you are “going to work,”

especially once you close the door of your home office.

Integrators, on the other hand, may not need a strict schedule. They may be very productive working in their pajamas. But they too need to set some boundaries while working from home. For example, they should deliberately block out time for important meetings or for solitary, focused work. Doing so might involve rearranging their schedule to align with those of their family members.

Managers’ behaviors toward employees also need to change when it comes to time. For example, a segmentor might have a boss who expected emails to be answered in off-hours before the pandemic. Now that boss may want to escalate those interactions into video calls at all hours, while the segmentor would prefer an audio call or an email exchange so that aspects of their home life remain sacrosanct. A manager who is an integrator may not be able to easily recognize the segmentor’s concern; as a result, they need to learn what routines will help each team member perform at their best.

One way a leader can do this is by asking people about their preference for meeting times and modalities, understanding that not everyone

always gets their first choice if schedules and needs vary among team members. For example, a manager could tell the team:

“I want to maximize everyone’s ability to focus—what times do you think you can consistently be available?”

If the schedule is variable, ask to do weekly polls to optimize the times, but rotate them to make sure that one team member is not always getting their last choice.

Space. Whether you are an integrator or a segmentor, you need to select your work-from-home space carefully—but where you set up shop may be different. Integrators may be comfortable setting up their home office somewhere central, like the kitchen or dining room, where they can keep an eye on what is happening with family members. However, as I mentioned above, segmentors should choose a room with a door, if possible. They should also pay attention to what home-related items are in their office and consider moving them to another room so that family members don’t need to come in and look for items while they are working.

Managers can help segmentors gain more control of their boundary challenges by

regularly clarifying the goals and tasks team members need to perform. This can help impose structure on the work itself; while this doesn’t necessarily affect space considerations overtly, it can minimize the stress associated with blurred boundaries, making shared spaces easier for segmentors to adapt to.

Managers should also be tolerant and encouraging of integrators working in a way that suits their individual needs and preferences. If an integrator shows up at a virtual meeting but has to check on a child or other family member, recognize that it is important for that employee to bring their whole self to work. They will be more satisfied and committed to the organization if they can display this side of themselves and know that it will be welcomed.

How Work-from-Home Norms Could Change Due to Covid-19

Keep in mind one of the most unique aspects of the pandemic’s mandatory work-from-home restrictions: There is little to no divide between people working in the office and those working remotely. At many companies, a majority of people are



doing the latter. This has a number of advantages.

First, managers aren't making assumptions about why people want to work from home, which in the past could result in biased conclusions about someone's commitment to the organization. Second, employees' concerns about missing out and being overlooked may be lessened and equalized, because no one is in the office. Hence, there is less FOMO.

However, this also means that managers and employees have to work more intentionally to build and maintain relationships. Scheduling virtual "watercooler" time provides an opportunity for team members to check in with and get to know one another better. Informal bonding and relationships help fuel better communication and allow people to interpret one another's meaning better when they are communicating while physically apart.

The Covid-19 crisis also has caused many managers and organizations to expand their definitions of what types of jobs can be done remotely. This may lead to more managers being open to work-from-home options, creating the opportunity for many workers to increase their flexibility in the future—

something we know segmentors in particular appreciate.

At the same time, the extreme blurring of the boundaries in the Covid-19 world may further push societal views—particularly those stemming from the Industrial Revolution ethos of work-home separation—toward a norm of integration. Kids interrupting a work conversation may become less taboo. Having a window into the home lives of one's coworkers may become not only acceptable but even expected.

There are potential costs and benefits to this. On the one hand, team members who are different from their coworkers—racially, socio-economically, or along other identity-related dimensions—might find this increased transparency challenging. On the other hand, and with organizational support, this may help these diverse team members find strategies for revealing aspects of their cultural background that allow their teammates to connect with them better.

Further, this window into our home lives may also help segmentors build a greater tolerance for family intrusions, from both their own family and that of their colleagues. Integrators may develop new limits to how much they are willing to blur

the boundaries when put to the test, finding ways to use segmenting strategies to be more effective while working from home. Under these extreme conditions, both integrators and segmentors might gain deeper perspective and broader skills over time.

We're still learning which nonwork topics are becoming more acceptable and which may be off-limits, as well as what the implications of working from home are for team building and authenticity more broadly. As you and your team and company begin to identify and explore these issues, question why certain things feel more appropriate than others. As this forced officeless life has shown us, some assumptions many have made about work and family separation have proved to be without merit.

Finally, as many workers transition back to the office in fits and starts, some of these dynamics will persist while others will change. Segmentors, seeking to reestablish the boundaries between work and home, may embrace a move back to the office more quickly than integrators. Managers should be aware, however, that what happens in the office also needs to be regularly communicated with those who are still at home. This hybrid form of remote

work makes clear communication and regular check-ins even more important. What's more, the virtual watercooler becomes even more crucial for forming and preserving relationships.

While Covid-19 presents us with a crisis, exacerbating the challenge of the permeability of work-family boundaries, it also allows us to think more systematically about how we approach workplace flexibility and remote work. Now is the time to learn more about your own integrator and segmentor tendencies and those of your team. By understanding how everyone works best from home, leaders can turn this unexpected crisis into opportunity as we develop new and better ways of working in the future.

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5. The Downside of Flextime

→ by MAURA THOMAS

REMOTE WORK, ESPECIALLY in a world affected by Covid-19, naturally leads to “flex-time.” Employees with small children might be getting the majority of their work done at night after the kids are in bed. Others are working early and hoping to have their workday end early. Still others are starting late and working late.

If everyone on your team is working different hours, you may be getting emails and messages at all hours of the day, night, or weekend—which can quickly create an always-available, or “always on,” environment. That might be necessary in some industries during these challenging times, but certainly not in

every industry and not for everyone in any industry. But once this takes root in your company culture, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to “reset” later. And “always on” isn’t sustainable. It increases pressure and quickly turns your company into an unpleasant place to work. It might cause even the

most dedicated employees to consider other offers.

I’ve been helping clients implement policies that prevent this for years, but it’s even more important now that employees are suddenly thrust, unprepared, into this unfamiliar work situation. So how can you accommodate your employees’ needs while

■ **Once an always-available environment takes root in your company culture, it becomes difficult to “reset” later.**

Communication Guidelines

Type of communication	During communication hours	Outside communication hours
Email	Routine requests, information sharing	Hold or use “scheduled send”
Team communication tools (Slack, Teams, and so forth)	Project-related communication, socializing	Set to “do not disturb”
Phone, video call	Relationship building, sensitive or complex topics	Time-sensitive or urgent only
Text message	Time-sensitive or urgent only	Time-sensitive or urgent only

still protecting your culture and your team’s work/life balance? The key is to embrace and encourage flextime while also defining clear communication hours (for example, 8 AM to 6 PM). Outside those hours, employees should be encouraged to change their settings to “do not disturb” and to use their email’s “schedule send” feature so that messages get delivered only during communication hours.

If any correspondence must happen outside the set communication hours, such as for urgent or time-sensitive issues, make them phone or text only. This way people can comfortably close down all other communication

channels like email, Slack, instant messenger, and so forth. The act of having to call or text someone is usually enough to give the sender a pause to think, “Do I really need this person now, or can the communication wait?” This allows everyone on your team to work whenever it’s appropriate for them but not feel like they have to work all the time to accommodate everyone else’s schedule. These challenging times don’t make downtime any less important. In fact, your team won’t handle the increased stress well without appropriate downtime.

Here’s how to improve the odds of success when implementing this policy:

Address the problem head-on.

First, explicitly acknowledge the problem and emphasize the importance of downtime. This can be done in a “virtual town hall,” which is a useful practice to keep everyone connected if your team is remote. These can be live or recorded messages from the CEO and senior leadership. I recommend making these leadership communications on a regular basis and repeating the importance of downtime frequently for reinforcement. The message can be something like this: “We believe that downtime is important, and we recommend that you track the hours you spend working and limit those to roughly 40 hours a week. Depending on your role, there may be times when more hours are required, but we expect and encourage you to balance busier times with intermittently lighter schedules.”

It may be tempting to refrain from giving this implicit instruction, especially if your organization is negatively impacted by the pandemic. But it will have a positive impact on your culture in the long term.

Provide guidelines for communication channels.

Second, establish clear guidelines about which communi-

cation channel should be used in which situation. You should continue to practice and enforce these guidelines even after stay-at-home orders are lifted and people come back to the office. For example, email should never be used for urgent or time-sensitive communication. This treats email as a “synchronous” communication channel, and it can never be that. No one is capable of monitoring every message in real time, and attempting it is an exercise in futility and a sure path to stress, overload, and eventually burnout. The classic *I Love Lucy* clip of Lucy and Ethel at the chocolate factory illustrates this problem perfectly.

If you ever use email to communicate urgent and time-sensitive communication, you’ll force your team to have to check every new message as it arrives, which is every few minutes for most people. This not only prevents downtime but also prevents your team from applying themselves to their important work in a thoughtful, undistracted way. I bet everyone on your team has work that requires more than a few minutes of sustained attention!

These communication guidelines should take the established “communication hours” into consideration. The above chart is an example



to get you started. You should ensure you have a complete inventory of all the ways your team communicates both internally and externally, and adjust your guidelines accordingly.

Use technology to your advantage. Consider technology solutions to help reinforce your desired behavior, such as programming the corporate server so that even if emails are sent outside communication hours, they aren't delivered until the designated times. Check if your team collaboration tools have "global settings" so that everyone is automatically set to the "do not disturb" mode outside the designated communication hours.

Model the desired behavior. And finally, leaders must model the behavior or else it will never work. Anyone in the organization who manages others should work hard to follow the guidelines themselves, and also reward and discourage behaviors accordingly. For example, saying, "Thanks for being so responsive" to someone who answers an email outside the defined communication hours sends a mixed message and will undermine the guidelines. Any "policy" that isn't followed by leadership

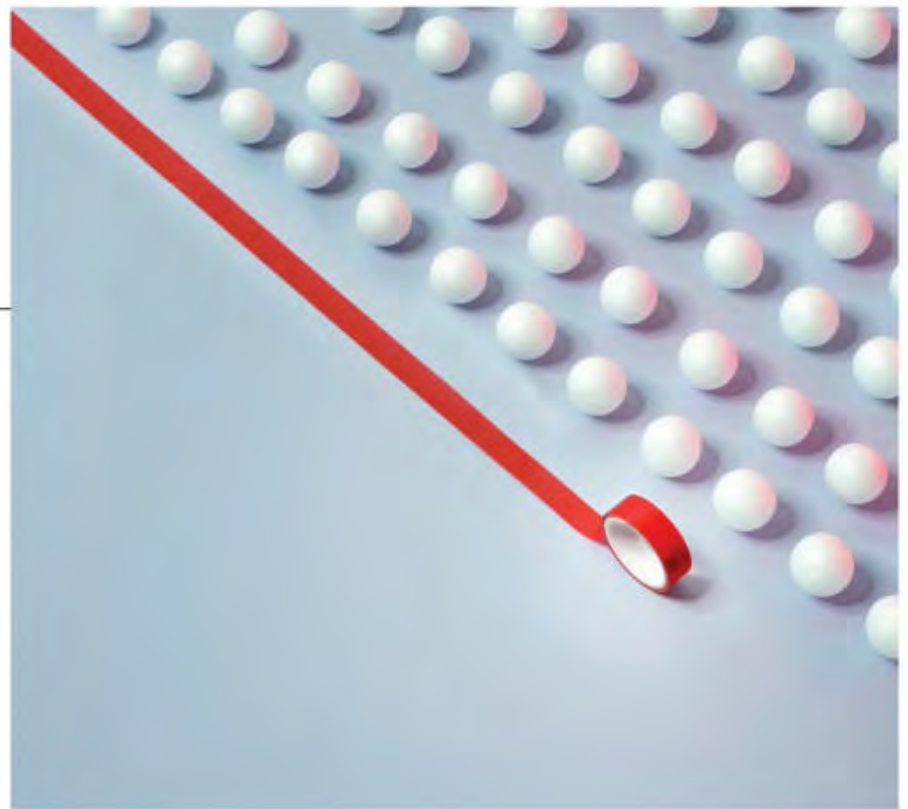
isn't really a policy at all. When leaders don't follow a policy, it erodes the trust, and therefore the culture, in an organization, because then you end up with "the official policy" and "the way everyone *actually* behaves."

With businesses thrust into a new reality they didn't plan for, it's easy for unintended results to erode company culture. If specific attention isn't given to the characteristics and consequences of the new reality, those unintended results will have detrimental effects that could last a long time. It's not too late to implement policies that will benefit your team's work/life balance while also protecting your organization's culture.

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6. Nine Practices to Help You Say No

→ by PETER BREGMAN

IRENE* IS A GREAT COLLEAGUE. A senior manager in a large consulting firm, she pitches in when the workload gets heavy, covers for people when they're sick, and stays late when needed, which is often. She's also a leader, serving on boards and raising money at charity auctions. She tries to be home for her kids at dinnertime but often works into the night after they've gone to sleep, that is, on nights when she's not at a business dinner.

But if you catch her in a moment of honesty, you'll find out that she doesn't feel so great. In fact, she's exhausted.

Irene can't say no. And because she can't say no,

she's spending her very limited time and already-taxed energy on other people's priorities while her own priorities fall to the wayside. I have experienced the same thing myself. So, over time, I experimented with a number of ways to strengthen my "no."

Here are the nine practices I shared with Irene to help her say a strategic no in order to create space in her life for a more intentional yes.

1. Know your no. Identify what's important to you and acknowledge what's not. If you don't know where you want to spend your time, you won't know where you *don't* want to spend your time.

The particulars of your reason for saying no don't matter as much as *having* a reason does.

Before you can say no with confidence, you have to be clear that you want to say no. All the other steps follow this one.

2. Be appreciative. It's almost never an insult when people make requests of you. They're asking for your help because they trust you and they believe in your capabilities to help. So thank them for thinking of you or making the request or invitation. Don't worry—this doesn't need to lead to a yes.

3. Say no to the request, not the person. You're not rejecting the person, just declining his invitation. So make that clear. Let him know what you respect about him—maybe you admire the work he's doing, or recognize his passion or generosity. Maybe you would love to meet for lunch. Don't fake this—even if you don't like the person making the request, simply being polite and kind will communicate that you aren't rejecting him.

4. Explain why. The particulars of your reason for saying no don't matter as much as *having* a reason does. Maybe you're too busy. Maybe you don't feel like what they're asking you to do plays to your

strengths. Be honest about why you're saying no.

5. Be as resolute as they are pushy. Some people don't give up easily. That's their prerogative. But without violating any of the rules above, give yourself permission to be just as pushy as they are. They'll respect you for it. You can make light of it if you want: "I know you don't give up easily—but neither do I. I'm getting better at saying no."

6. Practice. Choose some easy, low-risk situations in which to practice saying no. Say no when a waiter offers you dessert. Say no when someone tries to sell you something on the street. Go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and say no out loud 10 times. It sounds crazy, but building your no muscle helps.

7. Establish a preemptive no. We all have certain people in our lives who tend to make repeated, sometimes burdensome requests of us. In those cases, it's better to say no before the request even comes in. Let that person know that you're hyperfocused on a couple of things in your life and trying to reduce your obligations in all other areas. If it's your

boss who tends to make the requests, agree up-front with her about where you should be spending your time. Then, when the requests come in, you can refer to your earlier conversation.

8. Be prepared to miss out. Some of us have a hard time saying no because we hate to miss an opportunity. And saying no always leads to a missed opportunity. But it's not just a missed opportunity; it's a trade-off. Remind yourself that when you're saying no to the request, you are simultaneously saying yes to something you value more than the request. Both are opportunities. You're just choosing one over the other.

9. Gather your courage. If you are used to saying yes, it will take courage to say no, especially if the person asking doesn't give up easily. You may feel like you're a bad friend or letting someone down or not living up to expectations. Maybe you imagine that you'll be seen or talked about in a negative light. Those things might be the cost of reclaiming your life. You'll need courage to put up with them.

After Irene tried these practices, she started working less and spending more time with her kids. She's

still doing great work and she's still valued by her boss and coworkers, but they've noticed the difference too, she told me. And not all of it is positive.

They're respecting her boundaries—they don't even seem to resent her for them—but she's had to give up something she never knew was important to her: her sense of herself as someone who could do it all. It's been hard for her to feel as valued and necessary as she did when she always said yes.

"Would you rather go back to saying yes all the time?" I asked her.

She answered me with a very well-practiced "no."

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**Name and some details changed.*

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7. Why You Need an Untouchable Day Every Week

→ by NEIL PASRICHA

I HATE MEETINGS. They sit subconsciously in my brain, taking up space. I prepare for them in my notebooks. I travel to them, and then back again, in the middle of my workdays. And what do most meetings usually result in? You guessed it—more meetings.

When I worked as director of leadership development at Walmart, my days were full of meetings. Everybody's were! And when I quit two years ago

to strike out on my own as an author and keynote speaker, I thought my days full of meetings were behind me.

But I was wrong.

I now have research calls and phone interviews, lunches with literary agents and web developers, conference calls about book titles and publishing schedules, and radio interviews and media prep calls. And before every speech I give, there's always a meeting with the client and

meeting planner to clarify goals and logistics for the event.

Meetings never really go away. But the real problem is that I'm now measured almost solely on my creative output. And there's no time for it. It's not just me, either. As our world gets busier and our phones get beepier, creative output has become a scarce resource. If you're not putting something new and beautiful out into the

world, then your value is diminishing fast.

I used to be one of those “wake up at 4 AM” or “keep chugging 'til 4 AM” guys who grinds away at work for hours while everybody else sleeps. It's how I wrote a thousand blog posts in a thousand days. But I now understand that you can drive in the express lane for only so long before the wheels come off.

I'm no longer that guy. Now when I get home after work, I soak in the time with my wife and two little boys. Nothing is or will ever be as precious to me, and I resist insight from anyone who isn't making space for loved ones. I realized that what I needed was a practical way to get more work done without taking more time. And, to be honest, I needed it fast. Why? Because in my first year as a full-time author, my productivity actually started to *slip*—even though I had quit my full-time job. It wasn't just disheartening; it was also embarrassing. “So how's the new book coming?” “Oh, now that I quit my job? Terribly!”

I finally found a solution that has saved my career, my time, and my sanity. I call it “Untouchable Days.” These are days when I am literally 100% unreachable in any way...by anyone.

PM IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES



Untouchable Days has become my secret weapon to getting back on track. They're when I complete my most creative and rewarding work. To share a rough comparison, on a day when I write between meetings, I'll produce maybe 500 words a day. On an Untouchable Day, it's not unusual for me to write 5,000 words. On these days, I'm 10 times more productive.

How Do I Carve Out Untouchable Days?

I look at my calendar 16 weeks ahead of time, and for each week, I block out an entire day as UNTOUCHABLE. I put it in all-caps just like that, too.

Why 16 weeks ahead? The number of weeks isn't as important as the thinking behind it. For me, at that point, my speaking schedule is locked in, but nothing else. That's a magic moment in my schedule. It's the perfect time to plant the Untouchable Day flag before anything else can claim that spot.

On the actual Untouchable Day itself, I picture myself sitting in a bulletproof car surrounded by two inches of thick, impenetrable plastic on all sides. Nothing gets in. Nothing gets out. Meetings bounce off the windshield. Texts, alerts, and phone

calls, too. My cell phone is in airplane mode all day. My laptop has Wi-Fi completely disabled. Not a single thing can bother me...and not a single thing does.

What About Emergencies?

The short answer is that there rarely are any. The long answer is when my wife asked me about emergencies, she didn't love my rant about how back in the day, nobody had cell phones and we were all unreachable at times. As a compromise, when I started scheduling Untouchable Days, I told her that I'd open the door of my bulletproof car for an hour at lunchtime. When I did, I came face-to-face with the whizzing bullets of 17 text messages, dozens of urgent-sounding emails, and endless robot-generated alerts and feeds—and precisely zero emergencies from my wife. So after a few months, we stopped doing that and instead I started telling her where I'd be. That gave her peace of mind that if something horrible happened, she could call the place I was working or simply drive over and find me as a last resort.

I've now pulled off Untouchable Days for a year. Nothing horrible has ever happened, and we've both grown

more comfortable with zero contact throughout the day.

What Do Untouchable Days Look Like Up Close?

I think of them as having two components. There is the deep creative work. When you're in the zone, you're in a state of flow, and the big project you're working on is getting accomplished step by step. And then there are the nitros—little blasts of fuel you can use to prime your own pump if you hit a wall. These unproductive moments of frustration happen to all of us, and it's less important to avoid them than to simply have a mental tool kit you can whip out when they happen. What are my tools? Heading to the gym for a workout. Grabbing a pack of almonds. Going on a nature walk. After all, Thoreau said, "I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright." And Hemingway stated, "I would walk along the quais when I finished work or when I was trying to think something out. It was easier to think if I was walking and doing something or seeing people doing something that they understood." What else? Meditating for 10 minutes. Or switching to a

new work space. Or, in the airport, leaving voice mails for my parents and close friends, telling them I love them. It works every time, and I get back to work quickly because, let's be honest, nobody ever answers their phone.

So what happens if the bulletproof car does get bumped? Say I get an incredible speaking invite or somebody much more important than me only has *this one day* to get together. Red alert: The Untouchable Day is under threat. What do I do?

I have a simple rule. Untouchable Days may never be deleted, but they can move between the bowling-lane bumpers of the weekends. They can't jump weeks, though. They are more important than anything else I am doing, so if they have to move from a Wednesday to a Thursday or Friday, that's fine—even if I have to move four meetings to make room. The beauty of this approach is that when you plant the Untouchable Day flag on your calendar, it really does feel permanent in your mind. You start feeling the creative high you'll get from such deep output as soon as you start booking them in.

Before I started using Untouchable Days, I treaded water—I wrote articles, I gave speeches. But something was missing. When I implemented



Untouchable Days in 2017, magic happened. I wrote a 50,000-word memoir, wrote and launched a new 60-minute keynote speech, drafted book proposals for my next three books, and completely planned and began recording my new podcast—all while traveling and giving more speeches than I ever had before.

With a year of Untouchable Days under my belt, do I *still* go through the exercise of scheduling one Untouchable Day every single week?

The honest answer is no. Now I schedule two.

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Neil Pasricha thinks, writes, and speaks about intentional living. He is the New York Times best-selling author of seven books, including *The Book of Awesome* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2001), *The Happiness Equation* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2016), and *You Are Awesome* (Gallery Books, 2019). His books have sold more than a million copies and have spent more than 200 weeks on best-seller lists. He hosts the award-winning podcast *3 Books with Neil Pasricha*, where he's been on a 15-year-long quest to uncover the 1,000 most formative books in the world, and gives more than 50 keynote speeches a year at places such as TED, SXSW, and Shopify.



8. What to Do When a Personal Crisis Is Hurting Your Professional Life

→ by AMY GALLO

AT SOME POINT, we all confront a stressful life event or personal crisis that threatens to distract us from work. Perhaps it's tending to a sick family member, coping with your own illness, or dealing with a divorce. These are all incredibly tough situations to navigate personally—let alone professionally. Should you disclose what's happening to your manager and

colleagues? How do you ask for what you need, such as flexible hours or a reduced workload? And how do you know if you should take a leave of absence?

What the Experts Say

"This is life, and these things happen to everybody," says Anne Kreamer, author of *It's*

Always Personal: Navigating Emotion in the New Workplace (Random House, 2011). But knowing you're in good company is not necessarily a comfort, especially if you're struggling to stay on top of your responsibilities at home and work. If you've reached the point where you say to yourself, "I can't get my job done," it may be time to ask for help, says Jane Dutton, a professor at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business and coauthor, with Jane E. Dutton, of *Awakening Compassion at Work: The Quiet Power That Elevates People and Organizations* (Berrett-Koehler, 2017). Here's some advice on how to navigate work when you're having a personal crisis.

Decide what you need.

First, take stock of the resources you have at hand "both inside and outside the organization" to help you through this crisis, Dutton says. Could friends or family pitch in? Could team members cover some of your responsibilities in the short term? What you need may not be huge. "It might be as simple as leaving work early on Fridays for a month," Dutton says. The key is to figure out what will help ease the pressure.

When you allow coworkers to discover more about your personal life, they are more motivated to meet your needs.

Consider how important privacy is to you. Before you ask for help, however, consider how much you're comfortable sharing. "This has to be an individual choice," Kreamer says. "There are many different reasons people choose to maintain their privacy," especially about illnesses that carry a stigma. Uncertainty about your standing in the organization is another reason to be afraid, she adds. Dutton agrees, noting that, in some cases, "it can be dangerous to disclose your situation." She suggests assessing the risks with questions like: What kind of culture am I in? Are there formal procedures for handling this? Do I need to go to HR, or are there people in my unit who can be helpful? Are they going to treat me humanely, or do I need to think about how to protect myself?

It's often better to share if you feel OK doing so and you believe that it's safe to share. "We've been encouraged to keep the boundaries between private and professional distinct, but that's not always helpful," Kreamer says. In fact, research by Ashley Hardin, a professor at Washington University's Olin Business School, shows that when you allow coworkers to discover more about your personal

life, they are more motivated to meet your needs. "If the situation is interfering with your ability to complete your job, your coworkers may already realize something is amiss, and in that case you are better off letting them in on what is going on," Hardin explains. You can also give permission to your close colleagues to share your circumstances with other coworkers if it is too difficult for you to tell them directly. "This type of indirect disclosure can open up a space for your teammates to brainstorm ways to help you," Hardin adds.

Set boundaries. You don't need to explain your situation in agonizing detail with everyone. Set boundaries for yourself and for others. You can turn to close colleagues for the more personal conversations, but keep in mind that "most people don't want to know every detail of your parent's chemotherapy. They want to know the pertinent information and how it's going to affect them," Kreamer says. Also, it can be tough to answer lots of questions and rehash the details of a sad situation, so don't be afraid to redirect the conversation back to work if a coworker continually inquires about the details. You might say:

"Right now, it helps my sanity to stay focused on work. Is it OK with you if we talk about the project instead?"

Ask for specific help.

"Ideally, when you share the news, your colleagues will say: 'I'm going to do such-and-such for you. Are you cool with that?'" Kreamer says. But if your coworkers aren't forthcoming about offering help, ask for it explicitly. And be thoughtful about how you frame your request. Research by Wayne Baker, a professor at the Ross School of Business, shows that how you frame your appeal strongly influences whether someone will agree to it. He recommends making the request specific and describing why the help is meaningful to you: "[We] often assume that the importance of a request is obvious, but it rarely is." And as with any request you make at work, give a deadline. You could say, "I'd love your help over the next two weeks while I'm out caring for my mother. Would you be able to complete the report we've been working on? It would free up my mind to focus on what I need to do at home."

Approach your boss. It's also a good idea to loop your boss into what's happening, assuming you feel comfort-

able doing so. If you have a very close relationship, tell her first and brainstorm ideas for reducing or covering your workload. But, in most cases, Kreamer says, it's best to talk to your manager when you already "have some notion of how you intend to handle the problem." Run a tentative plan by your manager, outlining the time period you expect to be absent or working less, the colleagues who might step up for you, and whether you've already discussed that possibility with them. Then ask for your boss's input.

Do what's right for you.

There is no right answer when handling a crisis situation. Some people might find comfort in coming to work every day. Kreamer did that when she was dealing with three family deaths—her parents and a grandmother—within six months. "I was overwhelmed by the tsunami of death, and work was very much a solace for me," she says. "Work is often an antidote, a space where you can forget about what's happening and operate as a functioning adult rather than feeling helpless in the face of these events." For others, it might be better to take an official leave of absence. "When you believe that you

If your coworkers aren't forthcoming about offering help, ask for it explicitly.

won't be able to function at the caliber that your job requires of you, it may be better to remove yourself from that situation for a time to recharge your batteries," Kreamer says. "When you push forward and don't allow yourself to feel the grief, you don't recover as quickly." Facebook is leading the way in offering generous bereavement leave, in the wake of COO Sheryl Sandberg's losing her husband, but not all companies offer paid leave, so there are financial and career implications to consider. Still, even a short leave—just a few weeks—might be enough time.

Principles to Remember

Do:

- Determine what type of support you need—at home and at work
- Tell your colleagues what's happening so that they feel compassion for your situation
- Make clear, specific requests of your coworkers and boss so that they know how they can help you

Don't:

- Feel you have to tell everyone directly—it's OK to ask close colleagues to explain to others what's going on

- Share every detail of your situation; tell coworkers only the details that are pertinent to them
- Assume that it will be painful to continue working during this time—sometimes going to the office can be a comfort

CASE STUDY 1

Reassure Coworkers and Maintain Boundaries

When Keisha Blair, cofounder of the career resource platform Aspire-Canada, was 31, her husband passed away suddenly from a rare disease, eight weeks after she'd given birth to their second child.

At the time, she was managing a team of six policy analysts in the Canadian government. The immediate response from her boss and coworkers was caring. "They were very supportive during my time of grief," she recalls. Although everyone had been expecting her back from maternity leave, they assured her that she could take off additional time should she need it, and she took them up on the offer, staying out 10 months.

But the situation was still challenging when she returned. "I could see that my story had really affected my colleagues," she explains. On her first day back, "there was an outpouring of emotions;

some cried openly in the office," she recalls. And "many had questions about how the kids were coping, my support system at home, and how I was doing in the aftermath of such a sudden, unexpected death."

Her response was intentionally measured. "I didn't want to totally shut down the conversation, but to limit unnecessary chatter and maintain my own composure as a leader, I told colleagues that if they wanted to come talk, they should feel free to do so in private. This way I could gauge how much a particular employee was affected and also manage my response," she says.

She also made it clear that there were some things she wouldn't talk about. These boundaries helped make sure these conversations didn't intensify her grief. If employees needed additional help, she referred them to the employee assistance program.

Looking back, Keisha is proud of how she handled herself during this time: "I became known as a strong and resilient leader."

CASE STUDY 2

Ask for What You Need

The day that Jisella Dolan received a job offer from Home Instead, an in-home care

organization for the elderly, she learned that her father had six to 18 months to live. Looking at the company's vacation policies, and thinking of how often she would have to travel to her parents' town, eight hours away, she didn't know how she could make it work.

Because she didn't know her prospective boss very well, Jisella was hesitant to share her situation with him. "He was basically a stranger to me. I had no sense of how he would respond to my story," she explains.

She assumed that Home Instead wouldn't allow extra time and "didn't want to ask for special favors, especially as a new employee." But it was her dream job, so she decided to explain the situation. "I had to be honest about how it might impact my ability" to do the job, she says. She was clear that she would need to leave work early on Fridays to travel to see her parents and probably take calls from her mother during her workday.

Jisella's soon-to-be boss surprised her. "They acknowledged and honored the position I was in and shared that they would work with me" on a solution. She was still expected to work hard. But, even when an emergency with her dad forced her



to leave an important meeting, no one questioned it.

The experience “bred instant loyalty to the organization,” she adds. Their “willingness to accommodate my needs made me more passionate about doing good work for them.”

Jisella’s father passed away six months after she accepted her job. Ten years later, she is still at Home Instead and now serves as its chief advocacy officer.

CASE STUDY 3

Make Your Plans Clear

Several years ago, when Jacqueline Ardrey was working as a senior merchandising and supply chain executive for Harry & David, she experienced a series of tragedies. First, her daughters’ stepsisters were killed in an accident. And then her mother died suddenly, leaving behind her ill father.

Her boss, colleagues, and team couldn’t have been more supportive. Even Harry & David’s CEO called her after he heard about what happened and asked what she needed. She asked if she could temporarily have Fridays or Mondays off, and he agreed without question.

But she made sure to stay in close touch with her team, in person when she was at the office and through

email when she wasn’t. “I let them know what was happening, what my plans were, and what they could or could not expect from me during my time out. It was such a critical time for the business, so I told them that I needed to be there for my kids and that I may not be as ‘present’ physically or in meetings, and I asked for their understanding.” When she wasn’t comfortable talking with someone directly, she wrote them an email.

Jacqueline will never forget the support she experienced while working at Harry & David.

She is now president of Cold Brew Kitchen, a supplier of coffee products. “I offer my team incredibly flexible schedules so that they can navigate their lives and goals. This event definitely had an impact on that decision,” she says.

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9. Are the People Who Take Vacations the Ones Who Get Promoted?

→ by SHAWN ACHOR

TOO MANY PEOPLE limit their happiness and success by assuming that taking time off from work will send a negative message to their manager and slow their career advancement. But new research says that the exact opposite is true. Taking a vacation can actually *increase* the likelihood of getting a raise or a promotion.

For the past two years, I’ve been partnering with the U.S. Travel Association to promote the business case for taking time off from work. Their new initiative, Project: Time Off,

is one of the most robust examinations of how vacations affect companies and employees alike. Their analysis has found that Americans are taking less vacation time than at any point in the past four decades. Why? According to Gary Oster, managing director of Project: Time Off, “Many people don’t take time off because they think that it will negatively impact their manager’s perception of them. But, that isn’t the case at all.”

If you or someone you know needs to be convinced to use your vacation time,

Smart vacations lead to greater happiness and energy at work, and therefore greater productivity, intelligence, and resilience.

here's a list of reasons it just makes good business sense:

Taking a vacation increases your chances of getting a raise or promotion. According to Project: Time Off, people who take all their vacation time have a 6.5% higher chance of getting a promotion or a raise than people who leave 11 or more days of paid time off on the table. That percentage may sound small (and it is a correlation versus a causation), but it is the polar opposite of the idea that staying at work might mean getting ahead. It simply doesn't.

A positive, engaged brain improves important business metrics. In *The Happiness Advantage*, I describe research that shows that when the brain can think positively, productivity improves by 31%, sales increase by 37%, and creativity and revenues can triple. In fact, the conclusion of my *Harvard Business Review* article, "Positive Intelligence," which was based on a decade of research, was that "the greatest competitive advantage in the modern economy is a positive and engaged brain." To be truly engaged at work, your brain needs periodic breaks to gain fresh perspective and energy.

But not all vacations are created equally. Consider research that shows that the *average* vacation yields no improvement in people's levels of energy or happiness upon returning to work. In these cases, it wasn't the time away that caused the negative or neutral impact; it was the travel stress. In a study of more than 400 travelers from around the world, Michelle Gielan from the Institute for Applied Positive Research and I found a strong negative correlation between travel stress and happiness. However, we also found that 94% of vacations result in higher levels of happiness and energy if you (1) plan a month in advance and prepare your coworkers for your time away, (2) go outside your city (the further the better), (3) meet with a local host or other knowledgeable guide at the location, and (4) have the travel details set before going. Smart vacations lead to greater happiness and energy at work, and therefore greater productivity, intelligence, and resilience.

Your manager will perceive you as more productive. According to research done by the U.S. Travel Association, managers associate personal happiness with productivity. In fact, when asked what vacation-time benefit would

motivate managers to talk to their employees about using more vacation days, the top benefit was increased personal happiness (31%), followed by productivity (21%). Why does happiness win out? Because most managers understand that happy employees are more productive and collaborative.

Not taking time off means giving yourself a pay cut.

There's no research necessary for this one; it's just simple economics. If you're a salaried employee and paid vacation is part of your compensation package, you're essentially taking a voluntary pay cut when you work instead of taking that vacation time. Why would anyone do that? Four out of 10 employees say that they *can't* take their vacation because they have too much work to do. But, think about it this way: Whether or not you take a vacation, you're still going to have a lot of work to do. Life is finite, and work is infinite.

What if you work in a culture that's just not supportive of taking vacations? In that case, it's time to come together with your coworkers and create a new social script that says: "Of course we take all our paid days off, because we want greater happiness and success at work." This

gives everyone license to benefit from time off. Once the social script allows it, your decision to become happier becomes much easier.

Start changing the conversation in your own company right now simply by sharing this research. Then, start planning your next vacation. It's good for you, and your career.

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Shawn Achor is the New York Times best-selling author of *Big Potential: How Transforming the Pursuit of Success Raises Our Achievement, Happiness, and Well-Being* (Currency, 2018) and *The Happiness Advantage: How a Positive Brain Fuels Success in Work and Life* (Currency, 2010). His TED talk is one of the most popular, with more than 20 million views. After spending 12 years at Harvard, he has now lectured or researched at more than a third of the Fortune 100 companies and in 50 countries, from Camp David to Camp Pendleton to refugee camps, and for groups like the NFL, the Pentagon, and NASA. He is currently researching how to bring positive psychology from companies to schools.



10. How to Get the Most Out of a Day Off

→ by ELIZABETH GRACE SAUNDERS

THE IDEA OF “vacation” often conjures up thoughts of trips to faraway lands. While it’s true that big trips can be fun and even refreshing, they can also take a lot of time, energy, and money. Many people feel exhausted even thinking about planning a vacation—not just navigating personal commitments and school breaks but deciding how to delegate major projects or put work on hold so that they can have a stress-free holiday. Because of this, some might put off their time away, figuring they’ll get to it when their schedule isn’t so demanding, only to discover at the end of the year that they haven’t used up their paid time off.

In my experience as a time management coach and a

business owner, I’ve found that vacations don’t have to be big to be significant to your health and happiness. In fact, I’ve been experimenting with the idea of frequently taking “microvacations,” usually every other week. These small bits of time off can increase my sense of happiness, and I feel I have room to breathe.

From my point of view, microvacations require you to use a day or less of vacation time. Because of their shorter duration, they typically require less effort to plan. And microvacations usually don’t require you to coordinate others taking care of your work while you’re gone. Because of these benefits, microvacations can happen more frequently throughout

the year, which allows you to recharge before you’re feeling burned-out.

If you feel like you need a break from the day-to-day but can’t find the time for an extended vacation, here are four ways to add microvacations to your life.

Weekend trips. Instead of limiting vacations to week-long adventures, consider a two- or three-day trip to someplace local. I’m blessed to live in Michigan, and one of my favorite weekend trips is to drive to Lake Michigan for some time in a little rented cottage on the shore or to drive up north to a state park. Especially if you live in an urban area, traveling even a few hours can make you feel like you’re in a different world.

To make the trip as refreshing as possible, consider taking time off on a Friday so that you can finish packing, get to your destination, and do a few things before calling it a night. That still leaves you with two days to explore the area. If you get home by dinnertime on Sunday, you can unpack and get the house in order before your workweek starts again.

There may be a few more emails than normal to process on Monday, but other than that, your microvacation shouldn’t create any big work pileups.

Margin for personal to-do items. Sometimes getting the smallest things done can make you feel fantastic. Consider taking an afternoon—or even a full day—to take an unrushed approach to all the nonwork tasks you really want to do but struggle to find time to do. For example, think of those appointments for haircuts, manicures, oil changes, or doctor visits. You know you should take care of these, but finding the time is difficult with your normal schedule.

Or perhaps you want to do tasks you never seem to get to, like picking out patio furniture, unpacking the remaining boxes in the guest room, or setting up your retirement account. You technically could get these kinds of tasks done on a weeknight or over the weekend. But if you’re consistently finding that you’re not and you have the vacation time, use it to lift some of the weight from your nagging list of undone items.

Shorter days for socialization. As individuals get older and particularly after they get married, they tend to spend less time with friends. One way to find time for friends without feeling like you’re sacrificing your family time is to take an hour or two off during or after a workday to



meet a friend for lunch or get together with friends before heading home. If you're allowed to split up your vacation time in these small increments, a single vacation day could easily give you four opportunities to connect with friends whom you otherwise might not see at all.

If you struggle to have an uninterrupted conversation with your spouse because your kids are always around, a similar strategy can be helpful. Find days when one or both of you can take a little time off to be together. An extra hour or two will barely make a difference at work but could make a massive impact on the quality of your relationship.

Remote days for decompression. Many offices offer remote working opportunities for some or all of the week. If your company offers that and working remotely is conducive to your work style and your tasks, take advantage of that option.

Working remotely is not technically a microvacation, but it can often feel like one. (Please still do your work—I don't want to get in trouble here!) If your commute lasts an hour or more each way, not having to commute can add back in two or more hours to your life that you can use for

those personal tasks or social times mentioned above.

Also, for individuals who work in offices that are loud, lack windows, or where drive-by meetings are common, working remotely can feel like a welcome respite. Plus, you're likely to get more done. A picturesque location can also give you a new sense of calm as you approach stressful projects. If I'm working in a beautiful setting, like by a lake, it almost feels as good as a vacation. My surroundings have a massive impact on how I feel.

Instead of seeing "vacation" as a large event once or twice a year, consider integrating microvacations into your life on a regular basis. Give yourself permission to take time for yourself.

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11. In Praise of Being Unproductive

Finding the off switch in an always-on world

→ by JM OLEJARZ

ARE YOU PRODUCTIVE? Efficient? Useful? More to the point, are you productive, efficient, and useful *enough*? These are the kinds of questions that arise (naturally and terrifyingly) when technology makes it easy to stay online and connected 24/7. But all this connectivity results in two unfortunate side effects. First, the expectation that we will be available at all times—from bosses, friends, the media, you name it—has increased. Second, the concepts

of productivity and efficiency have been redefined according to what our devices enable. If you *could* be working, a certain line of thinking goes, then you *should* be.

Yet being able to use technology as much as we want doesn't guarantee that we're using our time well. The devices we love are full of bright, colorful distractions, tempting us to scroll just a little further, to refresh again and again. (Let's not forget: Tech companies design their

Pulling back from what's efficient and profitable lets us focus on what's actually worthwhile.

products to be addictive.) And the downsides of heavy technology use, studies show, are numerous: depression, loneliness, isolation, lower empathy, and even suicidal thoughts.

In her new book, *24/6*, Tiffany Shlain, the founder of the Webby Awards, lays out a plan for surviving our “always on” culture. Taking a cue from her Jewish heritage, she suggests a “tech Shabbat”: one day a week without screens or devices.

For thousands of years Shabbat has prescribed that people set aside time to rest and reflect. Shlain writes that her modern interpretation benefits our mental and physical health—and she has spent the past decade practicing it. Unplugging gives us more chances to enjoy hobbies and socialize, she says, but one of its greatest gifts is perspective. When we step away from technology on a regular basis, it becomes easier to consider whether we’re using it wisely.

What else can you do to resist a digital world that demands your nonstop productivity? The artist Jenny Odell has an idea: nothing. In *How to Do Nothing*, her treatise on capitalism’s tendency to equate “useful” with “can make money,” she argues for the value of being useless. But the nothing she favors

isn’t about idleness or apathy. It’s about reclaiming our time and putting it toward activities whose point isn’t profit.

The danger of capitalist notions of value is that they’re linked to economic output, a metric that misses, well, almost everything. To an algorithm, the worth of a conversation between two people might be insights into what they’re likely to buy. To the two people, of course, the worth is the conversation itself. Odell contends that when our identities depend solely on what we contribute to a company’s P&L statement, we’re likely to end up losing who we really are.

Our sense of meaning, she writes, should instead come from our connections to the places in which we live and to the people, plants, and animals we share them with. The digital world can’t match the natural one as a source of purpose; a Saturday spent online won’t make you happier, but a Saturday spent learning about local wildlife or building community in your town just might. That’s why her “nothing” is anything but: Pulling back from what’s efficient and profitable lets us focus on what’s actually worthwhile.

Stillness Is the Key, by Ryan Holiday, offers another take on why you should do more

nothing. The book explores the virtues that helped famous figures achieve some of their greatest triumphs. John F. Kennedy (patience, solitude) resisted the urgings of advisers to pursue aggressive military action during the Cuban missile crisis, preferring to wait out the Soviets with a blockade. Napoleon (focus, prioritization) waited weeks to reply to letters, believing that most matters would resolve themselves and saving his attention for the truly important. Marina Abramović (being present) sat silent in a chair for 750 hours during her 2010 MoMA performance piece, making sustained eye contact and forming emotional connections with visitor after visitor. Holiday frames these stories as examples of “stillness,” his term for the traits on display. Cultivating stillness, he says, gives us a better chance to succeed in our relentlessly kinetic world.

When I started writing this article, my editor asked me to try my own experiment of unplugging for 24 hours. I agreed, but honestly, I was skeptical. I’ve spent the past few years weaning myself off social media. I keep my phone on “do not disturb” at work. I don’t check email on weekends. I read 26 books last year. Did I really need a

tech Shabbat, a day to be still and do nothing?

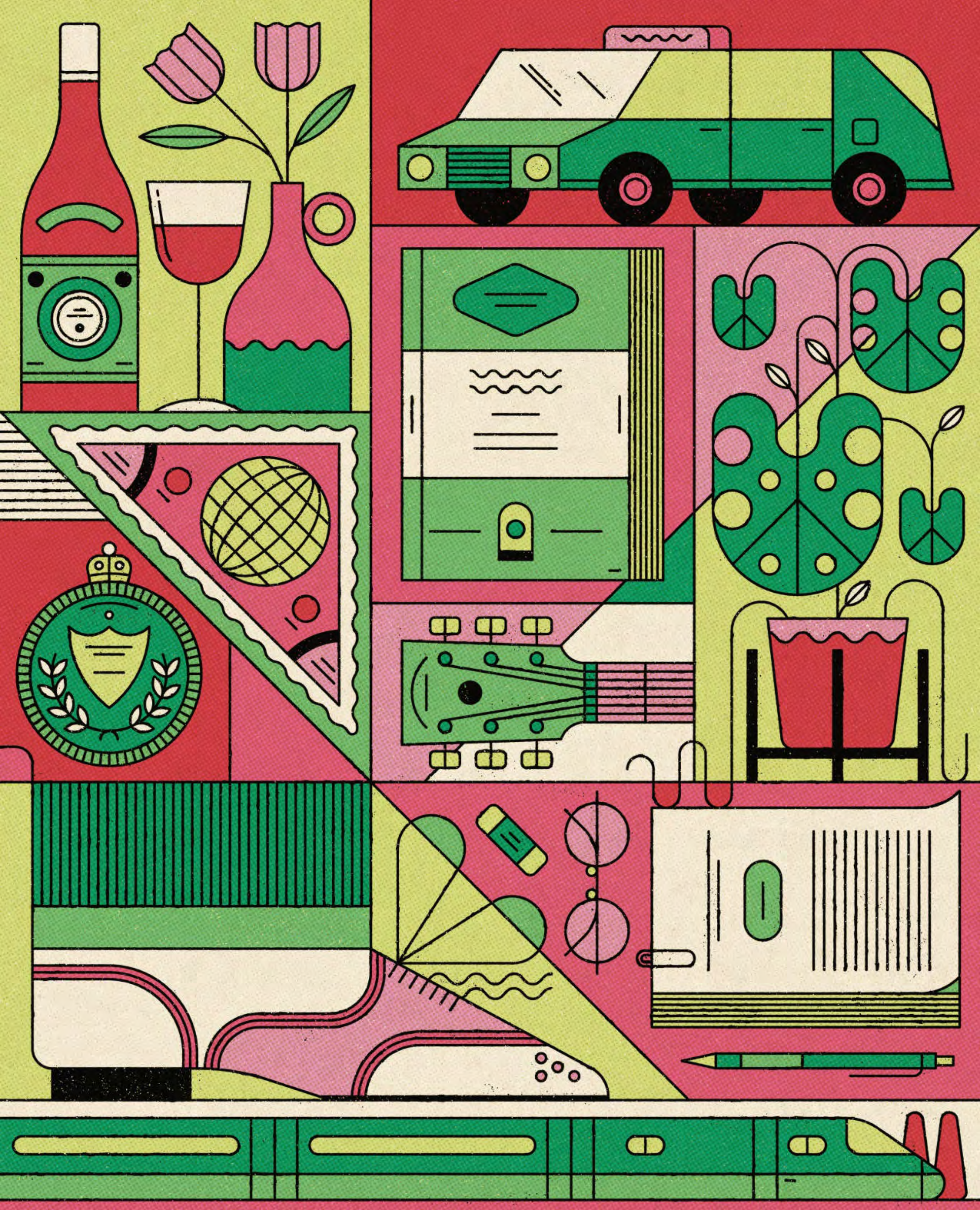
As it turns out, yes. My smartphone once excited me because of all the things it could do; now its absence did because of all the things I *couldn’t* do. It won’t surprise you to learn that my day was pretty analog: I meditated, listened to records, repotted a plant, went for a walk. What surprised me was that taking a break from screens brought an almost magical sense of being more in control of my time. Staring at people around me (most of whom were staring at their phones), I felt as though I was undercover, resisting the efficiency economy while in plain sight. I couldn’t help thinking of the movie *Brazil*, that great satire on technology and the shadowy organizations that oversee our every move and what it takes to break free of them.

Even for a digital curmudgeon like me, being “unproductive” felt like a small revolution—and that’s after only one day of it. I can’t wait to discover what a decade of tech Shabbats feels like.

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Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life

Traditional thinking pits work and the rest of our lives against each other. But taking smart steps to integrate work, home, community, and self will make you a more productive leader and a more fulfilled person.

→ by STEWART D. FRIEDMAN

IN MY RESEARCH and coaching work over the past two decades, I have met many people who feel unfulfilled, overwhelmed, or stagnant because they are forsaking performance in one or more aspects of their lives. They aren't bringing their leadership abilities to bear in all of life's domains—work, home, community, and self (mind, body, and spirit). Of course, there will always be some tension among the different roles we play. But, contrary to the common wisdom, there's no reason to assume that it's a zero-sum game. It makes more sense to pursue excellent performance as a leader in all four domains—achieving what I call “four-way wins”—not trading off one for another but finding mutual value among them.

This is the main idea in a program called Total Leadership that I teach at the Wharton School and at companies and workshops around the world. “Total” because it's about the whole person and “Leadership” because it's about creating sustainable change to benefit not just you but the most important people around you.

Scoring four-way wins starts by taking a clear view of what you want from and can contribute to each domain of your life, now and in the future, with thoughtful consideration of the people who matter most to you and the expectations you have for one another. This is followed by systematically designing and implementing carefully crafted experiments—doing something new for a short period

to see how it affects all four domains. If an experiment doesn't work out, you stop or adjust, and little is lost. If it does work out, it's a small win; over time these add up so that your overall efforts are focused increasingly on what and who matter most. Either way, you learn more about how to lead in all parts of your life.

This process doesn't require inordinate risk. On the contrary, it works because it entails realistic expectations, short-term changes that are in your control, and the explicit support of those around you. Take, for instance, Kenneth Chen, a manager I met at a workshop in 2005. (All names in this article are pseudonyms.) His professional goal was to become CEO, but he had other goals as well, which on the face of it might have appeared conflicting. He had recently moved to Philadelphia and wanted to get more involved with his community. He also wished to strengthen bonds with his family. To further all of these goals, he decided to join a city-based community board, which would not only allow him to hone his leadership skills (in support of his professional goal) but also have benefits in the family domain. It would give him more in common with his sister, a teacher who gave back to the community every day, and he hoped his fiancée would participate as well, enabling them to do something together for the greater good. He would feel more spiritually alive and this, in turn, would increase his self-confidence at work.

Now, about three years later, he reports that he is not only on a community board with his fiancée but also on the formal succession track for CEO. He's a better leader in all aspects of his life because he is acting in ways that are



more consistent with his values. He is creatively enhancing his performance in all domains of his life and leading others to improve their performance by encouraging them to better integrate the different parts of their lives, too.

Kenneth is not alone. Workshop participants assess themselves at the beginning and the end of the program, and they consistently report improvements in their effectiveness, as well as a greater sense of harmony among the once-competing domains of their lives. In a study over a four-month period of more than 300 business professionals (whose average age was about 35), their *satisfaction* increased by an average of 20% in their work lives, 28% in their home lives, and 31% in their community lives. Perhaps most significant, their satisfaction in the domain of the self—their physical and emotional health and their intellectual and spiritual growth—increased by 39%. But they also reported that their *performance* improved: at work (by 9%), at home (15%), in the community (12%), and personally (25%). Paradoxically, these gains were made even as participants spent less time on work and more on other aspects of their lives. They're working smarter—and they're more focused, passionate, and committed to what they're doing.

While hundreds of leaders at all levels go through this program every year, you don't need a workshop to identify worthwhile experiments. The process is pretty straightforward, though not simple. In the sections that follow, I will give you an overview of the process and take you through the basics of designing and implementing experiments to produce four-way wins.

The Total Leadership Process

The Total Leadership concept rests on three principles:

- **Be real:** Act with authenticity by clarifying what's important.
- **Be whole:** Act with integrity by respecting the whole person.
- **Be innovative:** Act with creativity by experimenting with how things get done.

You begin the process by thinking, writing, and talking with peer coaches to identify your core values, your leadership vision, and the current alignment of your actions and values—clarifying what's important. Peer coaching is enormously valuable, at this stage and throughout, because an outside perspective provides a sounding board for your ideas, challenges you, gives you a fresh way to see the possibilities for innovation, and helps hold you accountable to your commitments.

You then identify the most important people—"key stakeholders"—in all domains and the performance expectations you have of one another. Then you talk with them: If you're like most participants, you'll be surprised to find that what, and how much, your key stakeholders actually need from you is different from, and less than, what you thought beforehand.

These insights create opportunities for you to focus your attention more intelligently, spurring innovative action. Now, with a firmer grounding in what's most important, and a more complete picture of your inner circle, you begin to see new ways of making life better, not just for you but for the people around you.

The next step is to design experiments and then try them out during a controlled period of time. The best experiments are changes that your stakeholders wish for as much as, if not more than, you do.

Designing Experiments

To pursue a four-way win means to produce a change intended to fulfill multiple goals that benefit each and every domain of your life. In the domain of work, typical goals for an experiment can be captured under these broad headings: taking advantage of new opportunities for increasing productivity, reducing hidden costs, and improving the work environment. Goals for home and community tend to revolve around improving relationships and contributing more to society. For the self, it's usually about improving health and finding greater meaning in life.

As you think through the goals for your experiment, keep in mind the interests and opinions of your key stakeholders and anyone else who might be affected by the changes you are envisioning. In exploring the idea of joining a community board, for instance, Kenneth Chen sought advice from his boss, who had served on many boards, and also from the company's charitable director and the vice president of talent. In this way, he got their support. His employers could see how his participation on a board would benefit the company by developing Kenneth's leadership skills and his social network.

Some experiments benefit only a single domain directly while having indirect benefits in the others. For example,

■ ■ The best experiments are changes that your stakeholders wish for as much as, if not more than, you do.

setting aside three mornings a week to exercise improves your health directly but may indirectly give you more energy for your work and raise your self-esteem, which in turn might make you a better father and friend. Other activities—such as running a half-marathon with your kids to raise funds for a charity sponsored by your company—occur in, and directly benefit, all four domains simultaneously. Whether the benefits are direct or indirect, achieving a four-way win is the goal. That's what makes the changes sustainable: Everyone benefits. The expected gains need not accrue until sometime in the future, so keep in mind that some benefits may not be obvious—far-off career advancements, for instance, or a contact who might ultimately offer valuable connections.

Identify possibilities. Open your mind to what's possible and try to think of as many potential experiments as you can, describing in a sentence or two what you would do in each. This is a time to let your imagination run free. Don't worry about all the potential obstacles at this point.

At first blush, conceiving of experiments that produce benefits for all the different realms may seem a formidable task. After all, if it were easy, people wouldn't be feeling so much tension between work and the rest of their lives. But I've found that most people realize it's not that hard once they approach the challenge systematically. And, like a puzzle, it can be fun, especially if you keep in mind that experiments must fit your particular circumstances. Experiments can and do take myriad forms. But having sifted through hundreds of experiment designs, my research team

and I have found that they tend to fall into nine general types. Use the nine categories described in the exhibit "How Can I Design an Experiment to Improve All Domains of My Life?" to organize your thinking.

One category of experiment involves changes in where and when work gets done. One workshop participant, a sales director for a global cement producer, tried working online from his local public library one day a week to free himself from his very long commute. This was a break from a company culture that didn't traditionally support employees working remotely, but the change benefited everyone. He had more time for outside interests, and he was more engaged and productive at work.

Another category has to do with regular self-reflection. As an example, you might keep a record of your activities, thoughts, and feelings over the course of a month to see how various actions influence your performance and quality of life. Still another category focuses on planning and organizing your time—such as trying out a new technology that coordinates commitments at work with those in the other domains.

Conversations about work and the rest of life tend to emphasize segmentation: How do I shut out the office when I am with my family? How can I eliminate distractions and concentrate purely on work? But, in some cases, it might be better to make boundaries between domains more permeable, not thicker. The very technologies that make it hard for us to maintain healthy boundaries among domains also enable us to blend them in ways—unfathomable even a decade ago—that can render us more



Idea in Brief

THE PROBLEM

Life's a zero-sum game, right? The more you strive to win in one dimension (such as your work), the more the other three dimensions (your self, your home, and your community) must lose. Not according to Friedman. You don't have to make trade-offs among life's domains. Nor should you: Trading off can leave you feeling exhausted, unfulfilled, or isolated. And it hurts the people you care about most.

THE APPROACH

To excel in all dimensions of life, use Friedman's **Total Leadership** process. First, articulate who and what matters most in your life. Then experiment with small changes that enhance your satisfaction and performance in *all four domains*. For example, exercising three mornings a week gives you more energy for work and improves your self-esteem and health, which makes you a better parent and friend.

THE RESULTS

Friedman's research suggests that people who focus on the concept of Total Leadership have a 20%–39% increase in satisfaction in all life domains, and a 9% improvement in job performance—even while working fewer hours per week.

How Can I Design an Experiment to Improve All Domains of My Life?

Our research has revealed that most successful experiments combine components of nine general categories. Thinking about possibilities in this way will make it easier for you to conceive of the small changes you can make that will mutually benefit your work, your home, your community, and yourself. Most experiments are a hybrid of some combination of these categories.

Tracking and Reflecting

Keeping a record of activities, thoughts, and feelings (and perhaps distributing it to friends, family, and coworkers) to assess progress on personal and professional goals, thereby increasing self-awareness and maintaining priorities.

EXAMPLES

- Record visits to the gym along with changes in energy levels
- Track the times of day when you feel most engaged or most lethargic

Planning and Organizing

Taking actions designed to better use time and prepare and plan for the future.

EXAMPLES

- Use a PDA for all activities, not just work
- Share your schedule with someone else
- Prepare for the week on Sunday evening

Rejuvenating and Restoring

Attending to body, mind, and spirit so that the tasks of daily living and working are undertaken with renewed power, focus, and commitment.

EXAMPLES

- Quit unhealthy physical habits (smoking, drinking)
- Make time for reading a novel
- Engage in activities that improve emotional and spiritual health (yoga, meditation, etc.)

Appreciating and Caring

Having fun with people (typically, by doing things with coworkers outside work), caring for others, and appreciating relationships as a way of bonding at a basic human level to respect the whole person, which increases trust.

EXAMPLES

- Join a book group or health club with coworkers
- Help your son complete his homework
- Devote one day a month to community service

Focusing and Concentrating

Being physically present, psychologically present, or both when needed to pay attention to stakeholders who matter most. Sometimes this means saying no to opportunities or obligations. Includes attempts to show more respect to important people encountered in different domains and the need to be accessible to them.

EXAMPLES

- Turn off digital communication devices at a set time
- Set aside a specific time to focus on one thing or person
- Review email at preset times during the day

Revealing and Engaging

Sharing more of yourself with others—and listening—so they can better support your values and the steps you want to take toward your leadership vision. By enhancing communication about different aspects of life, you demonstrate respect for the whole person.

EXAMPLES

- Have weekly conversations about religion with spouse
- Describe your vision to others
- Mentor a new employee

Time Shifting and “Re-Placing”

Working remotely or during different hours to increase flexibility and thus better fit in community, family, and personal activities while increasing efficiency; questioning traditional assumptions and trying new ways to get things done.

EXAMPLES

- Work from home
- Take music lessons during your lunch hour
- Do work during your commute

Delegating and Developing

Reallocating tasks in ways that increase trust, free up time, and develop skills in yourself and others; working smarter by reducing or eliminating low-priority activities.

EXAMPLES

- Hire a personal assistant
- Have a subordinate take on some of your responsibilities

Exploring and Venturing

Taking steps toward a new job, career, or other activity that better aligns your work, home, community, and self with your core values and aspirations.

EXAMPLES

- Take on new roles at work, such as a cross-functional assignment
- Try a new coaching style
- Join the board of your child’s day care center



productive and more fulfilled. These tools give us choices. The challenge we all face is learning how to use them wisely, and smart experiments give you an opportunity to increase your skill in doing so. The main point is to identify possibilities that will work well in your unique situation.

All effective experiments require that you question traditional assumptions about how things get done, as the sales director did. It's easier to feel free to do this, and to take innovative action, when you know that your goal is to improve performance in all domains and that you'll be gathering data about the impact of your experiment to determine if indeed it is working—for your key stakeholders and for you.

Whatever type you choose, the most useful experiments feel like something of a stretch: not too easy, not too daunting. It might be something quite mundane for someone else, but that doesn't matter. What's critical is that *you* see it as a moderately difficult challenge.

Choose a few, get started, and adapt. Coming up with possibilities is an exercise in unbounded imagination. But when it comes time to take action, it's not practical to try out more than three experiments at once. Typically, two turn out to be relatively successful and one goes haywire, so you will earn some small wins, and learn something useful about leadership, without biting off more than you can chew. Now the priority is to narrow the list to the three most-promising candidates by reviewing which will:

- Give you the best overall return on your investment
- Be the most costly in regret and missed opportunities if you *don't* do it

- Allow you to practice the leadership skills you most want to develop
- Be the most fun by involving more of what you want to be doing
- Move you furthest toward your vision of how you want to lead your life

Once you choose and begin to move down the road with your experiment, however, be prepared to adapt to the unforeseen. Don't become too wedded to the details of any one experiment's plan, because you will at some point be surprised and need to adjust. An executive I'll call Lim, for example, chose as one experiment to run the Chicago Marathon. He had been feeling out of shape, which in turn diminished his energy and focus both at work and at home. His wife, Joanne, was pregnant with their first child and initially supported the plan because she believed that the focus required by the training and the physical outlet it provided would make Lim a better father. The family also had a strong tradition of athleticism, and Joanne herself was an accomplished athlete. Lim was training with his boss and other colleagues, and all agreed that it would be a healthy endeavor that would improve professional communication (as they thought there would be plenty of time to bond during training).

But as her delivery date approached, Joanne became apprehensive, which she expressed to Lim as concern that he might get injured. Her real concern, though, was that he was spending so much time on an activity that might drain his energy at a point when the family needed him most. One adjustment that Lim made to reassure Joanne of his commitment to their family was to initiate another experiment in which

he took the steps needed to allow him to work at home on Thursday afternoons. He had to set up some new technologies and agree to send a monthly memo to his boss summarizing what he was accomplishing on those afternoons. He also bought a baby sling, which would allow him to keep his new son with him while at home.

In the end, not only were Joanne and their baby on hand to cheer Lim on while he ran the marathon, but she ended up joining him for the second half of the race to give him a boost when she saw his energy flagging. His business unit's numbers improved during the period when he was training and working at home. So did the unit's morale—people began to see the company as more flexible, and they were encouraged to be more creative in how they got their own work done—and word got around. Executives throughout the firm began to come up with their own ideas for ways to pay more attention to other sides of their employees' lives and so build a stronger sense of community at work.

The investment in a well-designed experiment almost always pays off because you learn how to lead in new and creative ways in all parts of your life. And if your experiments turn out well—as they usually, but not always, do—it will benefit everyone: you, your business, your family, and your community.

Measuring Progress

The only way to fail with an experiment is to fail to learn from it, and this makes useful metrics essential. No doubt it's better to achieve the results you are after than to fall short, but hitting targets does

How Do I Know If My Experiment Is Working?

Using this tool, an executive I'll call Kenneth Chen systematically set out in detail his various goals, the metrics he would use to measure his progress, and the steps he would take in conducting an experiment that would further those goals—joining the board of a nonprofit organization. Kenneth's work sheet is merely an example: Every person's experiments, goals, and metrics are unique.

	Experiment's Goals	How I Will Measure Success
WORK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → To fulfill the expectation that executives will give back to the local community → To establish networks with other officers in my company and other professionals in the area → To learn leadership skills from other board members and from the organization I join 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Collect business cards from everyone I meet on the board and during board meetings, and keep track of the number of professionals I meet → After each meeting, regularly record the leadership skills of those I would like to emulate
HOME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → To join a board that can involve my fiancée, Celine → To have something to discuss with my sister (a special-education instructor) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → See whether Celine gets involved in the board → Record the number of conversations my sister and I have about community service for the next three months and see whether they have brought us closer
COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → To provide my leadership skills to a nonprofit organization → To get more involved in giving back to the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Record what I learn about each nonprofit organization I research → Record the number of times I attend board meetings
SELF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → To feel good about contributing to others' welfare → To see others grow as a result of my efforts → To become more compassionate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Assess how I feel about myself in a daily journal → Assess the effect I have on others in terms of potential number of people affected → Ask for feedback from others about whether I've become more compassionate

Implementation Steps

- Meet with my manager, who has sat on many boards and can provide support and advice
- Meet with the director of my company's foundation to determine my real interests and to help assess what relationship our firm has with various community organizations
- Discuss my course of action with my fiancée and see whether joining a board interests her
- Sign up to attend the December 15 overview session of the Business on Board program
- Assess different opportunities within the community and then reach out to organizations I'm interested in
- Apply for membership to a community board

not in itself advance you toward becoming the leader you want to be. Failed experiments give you, and those around you, information that helps create better ones in the future.

The exhibit "How Do I Know If My Experiment Is Working?" shows how Kenneth Chen measured his progress. He used this simple chart to spell out the intended benefits of his experiment in each of the four domains and how he would assess whether he had realized these benefits. To set up your own scorecard, use a separate sheet for each experiment; at the top of the page, write a brief description of it. Then record your goals for each domain in the first column. In the middle column, describe your results metrics: how you will measure whether the goals for each domain have been achieved. In the third column, describe your action metrics—the plan for the steps you will take to implement your experiment. As you begin to implement your plan, you may find that your initial indicators are too broad or too vague, so refine your scorecard as you go along to make it more useful for you. The main point is to have practical ways of measuring your outcomes and your progress toward them, and the approach you take only needs to work for you and your stakeholders.

Workshop participants have used all kinds of metrics: cost savings from reduced travel, number of email misunderstandings averted, degree of satisfaction with family time, hours spent volunteering at a teen center, and so on. Metrics may be objective or subjective, qualitative or quantitative, reported by you or by others, and frequently or intermittently observed. When it comes



to frequency, for instance, it helps to consider how long you'll be able to remember what you did. For example, if you were to go on a diet to get healthier, increase energy, and enhance key relationships, food intake would be an important metric. But would you be able to remember what you ate two days ago?

Small Wins for Big Change

Experiments shouldn't be massive, all-encompassing shifts in the way you live. Highly ambitious designs usually fail because they're too much to handle. The best experiments let you try something new while minimizing the inevitable risks associated with change. When the stakes are smaller, it's easier to overcome the fear of failure that inhibits innovation. You start to see results, and others take note, which both inspires you to go further and builds support from your key stakeholders.

Another benefit of the small-wins approach to experiments is that it opens doors that would otherwise be closed. You can say to people invested in the decision, "Let's just try this. If it doesn't work, we'll go back to the old way or try something different." By framing an experiment as a trial, you reduce resistance because people are more likely to try something new if they know it's not permanent and if they have control over deciding whether the experiment is working according to *their* performance expectations.


But "small" is a relative term—what might look like a small step for you could seem like a giant leap to me, and vice versa. So don't get hung up on the word. What's more, this isn't about the scope or importance of the changes you

eventually make. Large-scale change is grounded in small steps toward a big idea. So while the steps in an experiment might be small, the goals are not. Ismail, a successful 50-year-old entrepreneur and CEO of an engineering services company, described the goal for his first experiment this way: "Restructure my company and my role in it." There's nothing small about that. He felt he was missing a sense of purpose.

Ismail designed practical steps that would allow him to move toward his large goal over time. His first experiments were small and achievable. He introduced a new method that both his colleagues and his wife could use to communicate with him. He began to hold sacrosanct time for his family and his church. As he looked for ways to free up more time, he initiated delegation experiments that had the effect of flattening his organization's structure. These small wins crossed over several domains, and eventually he did indeed transform his company and his own role in it. When I spoke with him 18 months after he'd started, he acknowledged that he'd had a hard time coping with the loss of control over tactical business matters, but he described his experiments as "a testament to the idea of winning the small battles and letting the war be won as a result." He and his leadership team both felt more confident about the firm's new organizational structure.

PEOPLE TRY the Total Leadership program for a variety of reasons. Some feel unfulfilled because they're not doing what they love. Some don't feel genuine because they're not acting according to their values. Others feel disconnected,

isolated from people who matter to them. They crave stronger relationships, built on trust, and yearn for enriched social networks. Still others are just in a rut. They want to tap into their creative energy but don't know how (and sometimes lack the courage) to do so. They feel out of control and unable to fit in all that's important to them.

My hunch is that there are more four-way wins available to you than you'd think. They are there for the taking. You have to know how to look for them and then find the support and zeal to pursue them. By providing a blueprint for how you can be real, be whole, and be innovative as a leader in all parts of your life, this program helps you perform better according to the standards of the most important people in your life; feel better in all the domains of your life; and foster greater harmony among the domains by increasing the resources available to you to fit all the parts of your life together. No matter what your career stage or current position, you can be a better leader and have a richer life—if you are ready and willing to rise to the challenge. 

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DO SOMETHING BESIDES WORK

Quick Takes



1. Diversify Yourself

→ by PETER BREGMAN

RECENTLY, A WOMAN working for France Telecom sent an email to her father. Then she walked over to the window on the fourth floor of her office building, opened it, stepped through, and jumped to her death.

The email read: “I have decided to kill myself tonight...I can’t take the new reorganization.”

If this were an aberration, one depressed woman’s inability to handle change, we could dismiss it. But, so far,

24 France Telecom employees have killed themselves since last year. And more than that have tried. One man stabbed himself in the middle of a meeting.

When confronted with this high rate of suicides, man-

agement at France Telecom claimed that, because of its size, 24 suicides isn’t that surprising. But there is something unusual happening, and not just at France Telecom. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, work-related suicides increased 28% between 2007 and 2008.

It’s tempting to blame the companies. A good article in the *Economist* pointed to a variety of things—the drive for measurement and maximizing productivity, recession-driven layoffs, poor management communication—that contribute to a disheartening, depressing work environment. The article concluded that “companies need to do more than pay lip service to the human side of management.” I agree. For sure there are things leaders can and must do to handle employees with more care, compassion, and respect.

But the problem is deeper and more complicated than a callous management team that cares about nothing except profits. The problem is also in us. It’s in how we see and define ourselves, in our identities.

The first question we ask when we meet people is “What do you do?” We have become our work, our professions. Connected 24/7 via

CINTASCOTCH/GETTY IMAGES

Stepping away from your work might just be the key to increasing your productivity.

our smartphones, obsessively checking email and voice mails, we have left no space for other parts of ourselves.

If we spend all our time working, traveling to work, planning to work, thinking about work, or communicating about work, then we will see ourselves as workers and nothing more. As long as work is going well, we can survive that way.

But when we lose our jobs or our jobs are threatened, then our very existence is called into question. “Establishing your identity through work alone can restrict your sense of self and make you vulnerable to depression, loss of self-worth, and loss of purpose when the work is threatened,” Dr. Paul Rosenfield, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, told me in a recent conversation.

Who am I if you take away my work? That’s a question we’d better have a solid answer to. Fortunately, once we realize this, we can do something about it. We can diversify.

I don’t mean diversifying your money, though that’s a good idea too. I mean diversifying yourself so that when one identity fails, the other ones keep you alive. If you lose your job but you identify passionately as a

mother or father, you’ll be fine. If you have a strong religious identity or view yourself as an artist, you’ll be fine. If you see yourself as an athlete, or even simply as a good, loyal friend, you’ll be fine.

According to Dr. Rosenfield, this is an issue of mental health, even for the mentally ill. “People with mental illness often feel their identity is reduced to being mentally ill. Part of their recovery involves reclaiming other parts of their identity—being a friend, a volunteer, an artist, a dog lover, a student, a worker. It takes an active and bold effort to broaden and overcome the diminished sense of identity that results from dealing with mental illness, hospitalizations, medications, and doctors saying ‘you need to accept being mentally ill’ without also saying ‘but I believe you are more than your illness and you still have potential to do so many things in the world.’”

Here’s the issue though: It’s not enough to see yourself in a certain way—you must act on it. It won’t help if you identify as a father but rarely spend time with your children, or if religion is a big part of your identity, yet you rarely engage in religious activities.

One obstacle is money. For many people, an obsession

with work is really about the concern of having enough money to support themselves or their family. How can we work less and still survive?

Perhaps it’s the only way to not only survive but thrive. Stepping away from your work might just be the key to increasing your productivity. And having multiple identities will help you perform better in each one, because you learn things as an athlete or a parent or a poet that make you a better employee or leader or friend. So the more you invest yourself in multiple identities, the less likely you’ll lose any one of them.

Of course, if you do lose one, you’ll be OK because you’ve got the others.

If you still believe that doing nothing but work is a necessity to support your lifestyle, it’s worth looking at ways to change that lifestyle so that you don’t kill yourself trying to maintain it.

Walk away from the email and have dinner with your family. Leave work at a decent hour and play tennis with a friend. Choose rituals that have meaning to you and do them religiously. Most important, be consistent—doing the same thing repeatedly over time solidifies your identity.

A good friend of mine lost her job about a year ago, and

I called to see if I could do anything. My intention was to help her find a new job as soon as possible. I knew money was tight.

I was pleasantly surprised though. She told me she had decided to postpone her job search for a few months. She was pregnant and wanted to focus on that for a while. Once she felt ready, she would look for work. She was too busy creating an identity as a mother to get caught up in her identity as a worker.

Recently I received an email from her telling me she was back at work. “I love the job,” she told me. “It’s a great balance to motherhood.”

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Peter Bregman coaches CEOs and senior leaders in many of the world’s premier organizations and has been recognized as the number one coach in the world by *Leading Global Coaches*. He is the best-selling author and contributor of 17 books, including his most recent book, *Leading with Emotional Courage: How to Have Hard Conversations, Create Accountability, and Inspire Action on Your Most Important Work* (Wiley, 2018).



2. Do You Have a Life Outside of Work?

→ by ROB CROSS

“I HAD A business trip canceled and free time out of nowhere. I went home on a beautiful summer day, and as I pulled into my driveway, I realized my family was scattered doing their things and that I had no friends to reach out to or hobbies that I had once loved. I sat in the car for more than an hour thinking about how I had gotten to that point.”

This comment from a well-regarded software executive reflects a pattern

I’ve seen in my work with hundreds of successful executives. Leaving college with a range of interests and friends, they choose a career that optimizes money, status, and sometimes a sense of impact. Work ramps up quickly to 12-hour days. Commuting and business trips result in less exercise and fewer social events, and their world narrows down to work and a few select friends. Buying a home and starting a family follows, further limiting social interac-

tion and increasing financial pressures, thus making work even more central.

At this point, these executives double down and move to a bigger home and better neighborhood with an excellent school district, because that is what good providers do. Sometimes they upgrade twice. In any case, this leads them into an echo chamber, where there’s no time for friends (and sometimes family) and work defines their entire existence for five

to eight years. They gradually lose the friends and activities that helped them cope with their stress. If the activities were skill-related, like tennis or running with a group, it becomes almost impossible to catch back up with those who stayed with it.

If they are lucky, they wake up in an epiphany moment like my Silicon Valley friend did. Many do not and end up burned-out, divorced, and in crisis.

My colleagues and I have studied these people for more than two decades, and we’ve noticed that a select few don’t fall prey to this vicious cycle. These people are in the high-performance category of their organization who also score high on measures of well-being. So we’ve spent time identifying what makes them able to manage a successful career while maintaining those critical social activities that create happiness.

We’ve found that they have almost always cultivated and maintained authentic connections in two, three, or four groups outside of work: athletic pursuits, volunteer work, civic or religious communities, and social clubs like book or dinner clubs. In contrast, people who were on their second or sometimes third marriages, unhealthy

■ Purpose is not just in the nature of our work but also in the networks around the work.

to a point of crisis, or with children who simply tolerated them had almost always allowed life to become only about work. Success at their jobs exclusively defined their life success and slowly took them out of all these groups and activities.

How do they get there? With the best of intentions, actually. A seductive way of justifying our choices to become unidimensionally focused on work is to look at life through the lens of provider: “I am making sacrifices for my family.” It is not that family is a bad choice. To the contrary, it is a critical anchor in our lives. But when working for your family defines you, you’re actually not providing for them the way you could if you maintained your other social ties. Paradoxically, a singular focus on providing through work robs you of your well-being and creates vulnerability.

You may feel, especially these days in which many people are thinking more deeply about meaning and purpose, that you have become this unhealthy, vulnerable unidimensional person. But you can change course and reestablish activities and social connections that will improve your life, and the lives of your loved ones.

Here are three ideas:

1. Shift just one activity to create diverse purpose-generating interactions.

Our sense of purpose in life is constructed through interactions in and out of work. For many, work is a legitimate source of purpose, but 50% or more of how we experience purpose and meaning is through the constellation of relationships around us. Purpose is not just in the nature of our work but also in the networks around the work. People in organizations doing noble work—curing disease, saving children’s lives, educating others—can be among the unhappiest, whereas those doing seemingly mundane things may feel a stronger sense of purpose. Both work and life connections create a sense of purpose.

Work connections that create purpose include:

Leaders and organizational culture. Working for an inspiring leader or vision, or being part of a culture that does the right things and cares about colleagues’ success.

Peers. Co-creating a meaningful future and engaging with those who share similar authentic values.

Teams and mentors. Creating a context for peers,

Connections That Create Purpose

Worksheet

Life	Points	Work	Points
Family		Culture/leaders	
Friends/community		Peers	
Volunteerism		Team/mentor	
Spirituality		Consumer	

teammates, and mentees to thrive—helping, seeing growth, sharing your learning, being transparent and vulnerable.

Consumers and stakeholders. Receiving validation from consumers of output—science that cures people or products that improve lives, for example.

Life connections that create purpose include:

Spiritual. Interacting around religion, music, art, poetry, and other aesthetic spheres of life that put work in a broader context.

Civic and volunteer. Contributing to meaningful groups, which creates a wellness benefit of giving and brings you in contact with diverse but like-minded people.

Friends and community.

Forging connections through collective activity: athletic endeavors, book or dinner clubs, relationships maintained with children’s parents.

Family. Caring for family and modeling valued behaviors as well as maintaining identity through interactions with extended family.

The goal here isn’t to suddenly shift your life to address all these connections. Use this activity to choose one.

Reflect on the figure above. First, allocate 100 points to spheres that currently provide you with the greatest sense of purpose. Spheres where you don’t allocate 100 points are spheres that could add dimensionality to your life.

Second, choose one activity that could have the greatest impact on the largest number

See transitions as opportunities, not threats, to discover a new and better version of yourself.

of spheres if you shifted it. If this is not immediately obvious to you, think about interests from your past. Leaning back into athletic pursuits, hobbies, and passions is often the first step for entrenched people to slingshot into new groups. Once you choose an activity, commit to a goal in that sphere by reaching out to the group it will involve. Set hard rules and engage family in reinforcing your pursuit.

After you've consolidated the shift into your life, do it once or twice more. You will discover, as others who've gone through this exercise have, that the excuses you were making for not connecting outside work are just that—excuses. You do have time, and work will adapt if you let it.

2. Be intentional in small moments.

Engage more purposefully even when it seems like there's little time to accomplish much. Focus on how to shape rather than be shaped by all your interactions. For example, you can:

Live “micro moments” intentionally. Simply demonstrating to others in small moments that you believe in them, or lifting them up, or helping them do the right thing will help you uncover

commonalities between you and others and understand their aspirations. Altering the way we engage in existing relations often uncovers ways our existing network can fuel a sense of purpose.

Create a persistent dialogue on what is worth doing.

People who avoid crisis moments in life spend more time talking with others about ways to live life. One successful executive formed a board of people she relied on in hard times. Unlike traditional mentors, this group was young and old and from all walks of life, but helped her consistently reflect on how she was engaging with purpose.

Return to relationships.

Strong relationships are often forged in difficult situations. How you handle adverse moments with the people in your life, your ability to see possibilities and be proactive and to commiserate with others, will get you through hard times and also build connections you can turn to.

3. Boldly lean into times of transition.

See transitions as opportunities, not threats, to discover a new and better version of yourself. Notice and unplug from things that are draining purpose, and then reinvest

in new activities and groups you want to engage with that could be a positive part of your purposeful identity. Most important, stick it out even when it seems scary or difficult.

Consider a successful high-tech executive that during a 20-year career had become someone she did not plan to be. Her job's toll on her health and identity slowly burned her out, and she quit a job that many would envy. She decided to lean into her health and try yoga. And knowing her cynical tendency, she promised her husband she would try it three times.

The first time she rolled her eyes at the overly nice people who showed up. The second time she internally mocked the “flaky, granola” instructor. The third time she endured a little better but nevertheless felt she was done. As the class ended, the instructor walked the room and touched everyone on their head.

To my friend's deep surprise, she broke into tears. As she unpacked this, she realized that this was the first time she had let herself be vulnerable or authentic in a long time. She fell out of pose. She felt exhausted from what looked easy. But she shared this vulnerability with strangers in the room—something her corporate persona wouldn't have tolerated.

Flash-forward and yoga has become a central component of her and her husband's life. It defines a large portion of their social world and even their vacations. But this never would have materialized without her leaning into and persisting through a transition. The relationships formed through the activity added dimensionality and perspective to her life that had not been there when work ruled all. They became a source of resilience and helped create the courage to live life on her terms rather than others' definitions of success.

To identify and capitalize on moments the way this executive did, consider the following:

Initiate transition when it makes no sense.

The time to stretch is when you are comfortable or you feel you have to hunker down to get through a situation. Lean in instead. Surge into a transition with early and broad outreach, re-creating connections into existing activities you enjoy (faith or sport) and initiating at least one new one.

Focus on your aspirational self, behavior, and relationships.

Use the transition to reflect on socially defined goals and aspirations or historical conventions that



have shaped you. Reflect on one way to invest in work you want to be doing or one activity with others that would add dimensionality and breadth to your life.

Beware of shocks or surges pulling you away from your values. Don't let your reaction to a negative moment or stretch of time take you from who you want to be—too often what seems temporary becomes embedded in expectations around you.

We live in challenging times to be sure. But our experience is often of our own making. Never in history have we had a greater ability to shape what we do and with whom.

Don't cede this control. If you've lost it, take it back. I've seen again and again that those who do actually have the greatest sense of purpose and well-being.

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ILBUSCA/GETTY IMAGES



3. Why You Should Work Less and Spend More Time on Hobbies

→ by GAETANO DINARDI

AS PROFESSIONALS AROUND the world feel increasingly pressed for time, they're giving up on things that matter to them. A recent HBR article noted that in surveys, most people "could name several activities, such as pursuing a hobby, that they'd like to have time for."

This is more significant than it may sound, because it isn't just individuals who are missing out. When people don't have time for hobbies, businesses pay a price. Hobbies can make workers substantially better at their jobs. I know this from personal experience. I've always loved

playing the guitar and composing. But just like workers everywhere, I can fall into the trap of feeling that I have no time to engage in it. As head of Demand Generation for Nextiva, I have enough on my plate to keep me busy around the clock. I can easily fall into the trap of the



“72-hour workweek,” which takes into account the time people spend connected to work on our phones outside official work hours.

When I crash, there’s always the temptation to do something sedentary and mindless. It’s little surprise that watching TV is by far the most popular use of leisure time in the U.S. and tops the list elsewhere as well, including Germany and England.

But by spending time on music, I boost some of my most important workplace skills:

Creativity. To stand out and compete in today’s crowded and constantly changing business environment, organizations need new, innovative ideas that will rise above the noise. I’m tasked with constantly looking for new ways to attract attention from potential buyers. But coming up with a fully original idea can be difficult when your mind is filled with targets, metrics, and deadlines.

A creative hobby pulls you out of all that. Whether you’re a musician, artist, writer, or cook, you often start with a blank canvas in your mind. You simply think: What will I create that will evoke the emotion I’m going for?

It’s no surprise that by giving yourself this mental space and focusing on feelings, you can reawaken your creativity. Neuroscientists have found that rational thought and emotions involve different parts of the brain. For the floodgates of creativity to open, both must be in play.

Perspective. One of the trickiest tasks in the creative process is thinking through how someone else would experience your idea. But in doing creative hobbies, people think that way all the time. A potter imagines how the recipient of a vase would respond to it. A mystery novelist considers whether an unsuspecting reader will be surprised by a plot twist.

When I take a break from work to make music, I reconnect with that perspective. I keep thinking about how someone hearing my song for the first time might respond. I do all I can to see (or hear) the world through someone else’s eyes (or ears). Then, when I resume my work project, I take that mentality with me.

Confidence. When I face a tough challenge at work and feel stymied, I can start to question whether I’ll ever figure out a successful solu-

tion. It’s easy to lose creative confidence. But after an hour of shredding on the guitar, hitting notes perfectly, I’m feeling good. I can tell that my brain was craving that kind of satisfaction. And when I face that work project again, I bring the confidence with me.

It turns out people like me have been studied. In one study, researchers found that “creative activity was positively associated with recovery experiences (i.e., mastery, control, and relaxation) and performance-related outcomes (i.e., job creativity and extra role behaviors).” In fact, they wrote, “creative activity while away from work may be a leisure activity that provides employees essential resources to perform at a high level.”

So to my fellow professionals, I highly recommend taking some time to keep up your creative hobby. It doesn’t have to be long. A study found that spending 45 minutes making art helps boost someone’s confidence and ability to complete tasks.

I also suggest you encourage your business to celebrate employees’ hobbies. Zappos puts employee artwork up on its walls and encourages people to decorate their desks however they wish. Some businesses hold talent shows.

Even employees who may not have these kinds of talents should be encouraged to do something that feels creative and fun. Some CEOs spend time on their own hobbies, setting the right example.

And when you find a little time for a creative hobby break, make it guilt-free. After all, when you do this, everyone stands to gain. ©

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Gaetano DiNardi is the director of Demand Generation at Nextiva.

COVID as a Catalyst: The Rise of the Remote Workforce

They said it couldn't be done, and yet it's become a way of life. Here's why it's worked.

Just a few months ago, the interplay between work, workforce, and workplace was well established: Workers generally came together as a workforce in the workplace to get their work done. Then they went home. Most systems—IT, management, HR—were set up to function in that paradigm. Remote work arrangements were often short-term or “exceptions,” and often discouraged.

And then the catalyst called COVID hit, and, often within hours, workers were sent home to carve out workspaces in their attics and living rooms, struggling to remain tethered, to form a workforce, to get the work done.

An Excellent Experience

The surprising result, confirmed in a new survey conducted this past spring by Lawless Research on behalf of Cherwell Software, is that remote working has worked—not only to keep workers safe but also as a way to benefit their companies. The vast majority of now-remote workers said their experience has been positive, and nearly half reported an increase in their productivity.

The key to the success? The evidence is in the data. The executives whose companies were further along the road to digital transformation were three times as likely to report “excellent” remote working experiences as those in the early or developing stages. And gains in productivity were more evident the more mature these companies were.

As one respondent put it, “We saw a rise in productivity and an increase in actual hours worked.”

These gains represent an enormous change from the results Lawless reported in a similar study it conducted for

Cherwell last year in which most workers described systems that weren't integrated and work that wasn't automated, all of which created a drag on productivity.

The Human Element

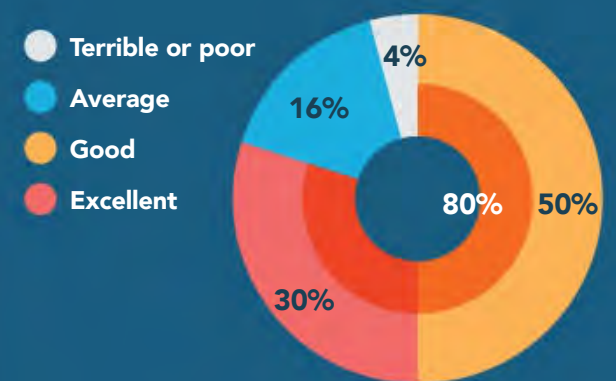
What's made the difference? It's a combination, Cherwell CEO Sam Gilliland says, of technology *and* management. Integrated, automated software, along with the ability to work on a low-code/no-code platform, has made adapting workflows faster and easier. So has “keeping the human element in mind. It's not just how people get their work done. It's how we connect with them.”

It's no surprise then, adds Kim Osoba, Cherwell's director of talent and organizational effectiveness, that Cherwell has seen a fivefold increase in RFPs for its digital transformation offerings—many of them for HR service management—since the pandemic began. “HRSM has become a lead step,” she says, “simply because these tools allow us to engage with a workforce that is now everywhere and needing information.”

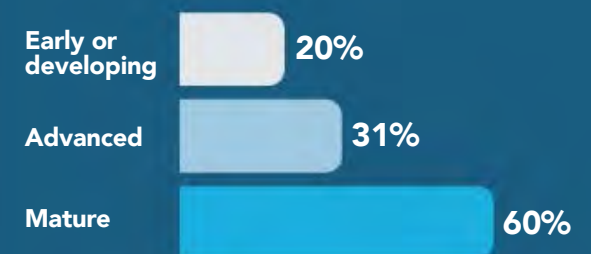
It's likely, says Gilliland, that the workforce will continue to be everywhere. While respondents guessed that only 43% of their workforces will remain remote post pandemic (compared to 61% these past several months), Gilliland notes that the survey was conducted before it became clear that remote working would be necessary—and feasible—for so long. In industries such as technology, he predicts, the percentage working remotely will be closer to 70%, with companies—and employees—reaping benefits that include not only productivity but also cost savings and increased employee and customer satisfaction.

Cherwell empowers organizations to improve service experiences and automate workflows using data that stretches across contexts and business units. For more information, visit www.cherwell.com.

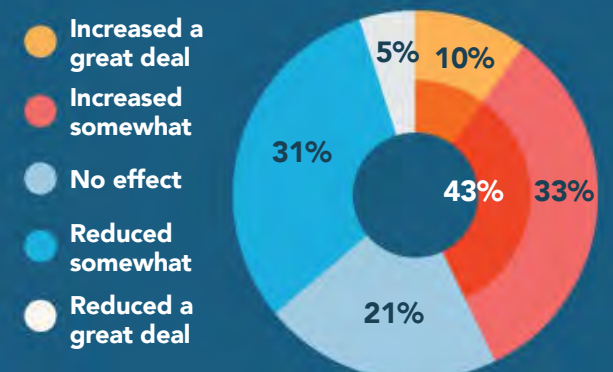
Most respondents were pleased with their remote working experiences, rating them:



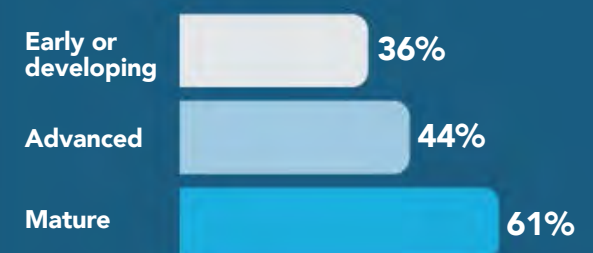
And digitally mature organizations were more likely to have found the experience excellent.



Working remotely has had a generally positive impact on productivity.

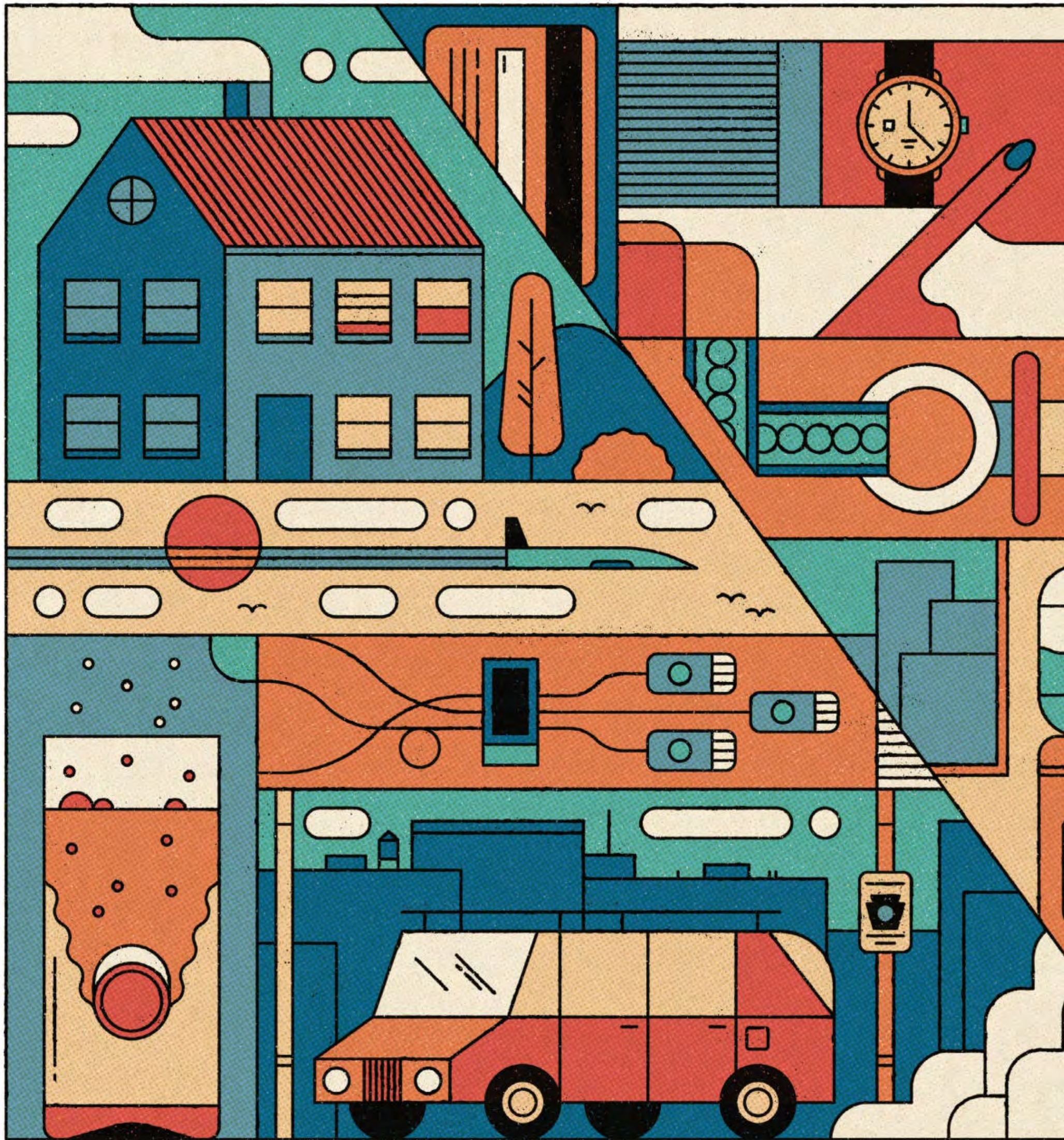


Increases in productivity were highest among digitally mature organizations.



SOURCE: LAWLESS RESEARCH, 2020







ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JULY–AUGUST 2019

A Working Parent's Survival Guide

The five big challenges—
and how to deal with them

→ by DAISY DOWLING

JACOB WAS A PARTNER AT a respected consulting firm and—to his delight—an expectant father. As the due date loomed, though, he became increasingly apprehensive. How would he and his wife, who worked long hours as a physician, find optimal childcare? Was it possible to use his firm's generous paternity leave without negative judgment from his colleagues and clients? And with his “road warrior” schedule, how could he be a present, loving father to his new daughter?

Gabriela, a venture-capital fundraiser, went to great lengths to balance the needs of sophisticated investors, her firm's partners, and her two small children. But she frequently felt overloaded and wondered if her managers



looked askance at her trips to the pediatrician's office and preschool. She confessed to some nervousness about her typical 5:30 PM departure from the office ("I never used to leave so early"), and she worried that she wasn't being offered stretch assignments that would lead to promotion.

Connie was a senior IT manager at a consumer-products company and a single mother to a teenage son. She was having a tough time helping him navigate the complex college-admissions process while delivering against tight turnarounds at work. And each late night at the office was a stark reminder of how little time she had left with him at home. Under the strain, Connie found herself becoming snappish at work—which senior management had begun to notice.

Jacob, Gabriela, and Connie—I've changed their names and certain details about them here—are smart, hardworking professionals, deeply committed to their organizations. But they are just as committed to their children. So all three are grappling with what I call the working-parent problem: the enormous task, both logistical and emotional, of earning a living and building a career while being an engaged and loving mother or father.

They're not alone. More than 50 million Americans are juggling jobs and child-rearing—and finding that hard to do. In fact, according to a 2015 study by Pew Research Center, 65% of working parents with college degrees—who have better career and earning prospects than less-educated parents—reported that it was "somewhat difficult" or "very difficult" to meet the simultaneous demands of work and family. And the issue isn't

limited to the United States; statistics are equally striking in other countries.

The problem is real and pervasive, and for moms and dads coping with it day to day, it can seem overwhelming. Working parenthood requires you to handle an endless stream of to-dos, problems, and awkward situations. There's no play-book or clear benchmarks for success, and candid discussion with managers can feel taboo; you might worry about being labeled as unfocused, whiny, or worse. Moreover, the problem persists for 18 years or more, without ever getting much easier. Years in, you may still feel as stressed as you did right after parental leave.

Under these conditions, it's normal to get tired, doubt your own choices and performance, and view your life as a constant, high-stakes improvisation. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can all gain more calm, confidence, and control, thereby strengthening our ability to succeed at—and even enjoy—working parenthood.

Over the past 15 years, first as in-house chief of leadership development at two *Fortune* 500 organizations and now as an independent executive coach focused exclusively on working-parent concerns, I've taught and counseled hundreds of men and women, including the three described above, who are struggling to combine careers and children—and I've "been there" as a working mother myself. While the challenges we face are many and vary in detail, the majority fall into five core categories: transition, practicalities, communication, loss, and identity. When people I've worked with recognize this and learn to see patterns in the

strains they're facing, they immediately feel more capable and in charge, which then opens the door to some concrete, feasible fixes.

In this article, we'll take a closer look at the core challenges, and then we'll cover a few effective ways to address them. We'll also see how Jacob, Gabriela, and Connie successfully put these ideas into practice—and how you can, too.

Understanding the Five Core Challenges

When facing the pressures of working parenthood, ask yourself: What kind of difficulty am I dealing with? Most likely, it's one or more of the following.

Transition. This challenge occurs when your status quo has been upended and you're scrambling to adapt. Going back to work after parental leave is the classic, visible example. But working-parent transitions occur regularly, in many different forms. The kids get out of school for the summer and their schedules shift; you hire a new sitter and have to integrate her into your family's routine; as you walk in the door after a business trip, you have to suddenly pivot from professional to caregiving mode.

Practicalities. This challenge consists of all the to-dos and logistical matters, large and small, that consume so much of your days—and nights. Searching for the right childcare, making it to the pediatrician's appointment on time (and then dashing to the pharmacy to pick up the antibiotics), getting the kids fed each evening, and taking an important conference call with a fussy toddler in the background all fall into this category.

■ The problem of working parenthood persists for 18 years or more, without ever getting much easier.

Communication. You face this challenge when you've got working-parent matters to discuss and you find yourself at a loss for words or at risk of being misunderstood. Perhaps you are announcing a pregnancy, asking your boss for a flexible working arrangement, negotiating the daycare pickup schedule with your partner, or telling your five-year-old that you'll be traveling for work again. The stakes are high, and your intentions are good. But the honest, constructive conversation you want to have feels frustratingly out of reach.

Loss. This challenge involves a kind of mourning. Maybe the baby took her first steps while you were at work, or you weren't staffed to a career-making project because you made a deliberate decision to work fewer hours. Now you're worried that in trying to combine work and family, you've missed out on what's truly important.

Identity. You experience this challenge when grappling with the inevitable either/or thinking and personal conflict that comes with working parenthood. Will Thursday find you at your son's debate tournament or at the big sales meeting with the new client? Are you a hard charger or a nurturing, accessible parent? Which is right, and which is *you*? You wish you had clearer answers.

Solutions—and Prevention

As every working parent knows, these challenges are never 100% resolved. They can, however, be preempted, mitigated, and managed. Five of the most powerful ways to do that are by *rehearsing* your transitions; *auditing* your commitments and *planning* your calendar;

framing your working-parent messages; using “*today plus 20 years*” thinking; and *revisiting and recasting* your professional identity and brand. Let's explore each technique in turn.

Rehearsing. Transitions are inevitable, but they're made easier through practice. For example, if you're returning from parental leave, stage an “as if” morning a few days early: Get the baby ready, do the caregiving handover, and commute as though you're really going to work. If you're switching childcare providers, make the new sitter's first day a dry run while you work from home, available for questions. If you're coming home from a business trip or a long stint at work, take a moment while en route to plan how you'll pivot into parenting: how you'll greet the kids, how you'll spend the evening together.

Run-throughs like these reveal potential snags (drop-off takes longer than you expected; the sitter doesn't know where to find the extra diapers; you catch yourself mulling over your performance review while putting your first-grader to bed). More important, rehearsing gives you time to iron out the wrinkles. It gets you out of working-parent “improv mode” and provides a comforting sense of “I've got this; I know that what I'm doing works.”

Auditing and planning. Like every busy working parent, you're doing more and have a broader range of commitments than ever before. That means that you need to become as mindful and deliberate as possible about where your time and sweat equity are going and why—or risk practical-challenge overload.

Try sitting down with your complete calendar, your to-do list(s), and a red pen. Highlight the commitments, tasks,



Idea in Brief

THE PROBLEM

When you become a parent, you face new work/life challenges around time management, identity, and logistics. While these challenges can never be fully resolved, they can be preempted, mitigated, and managed.

THE SOLUTION

Five strategies can help you balance job and family: *rehearse* transitions, such as by practicing your commute and childcare handoff before returning from parental leave; *audit* your commitments and *plan* your calendar to be thoughtful about where you're spending time and energy; *frame* your working-parent communications, such as by telling colleagues when you'll be offline and why; use “*today plus 20 years*” thinking to remind yourself how working now will support your family's future; and *revisit and recast* your professional identity, since it may need to change to reflect your current priorities.

THE PAYOFF

Equipping yourself with specific, practical strategies will help ensure you are both the parent and the professional you want to be.

and obligations you could have put off, handled more efficiently, delegated, automated, or said no to over the past week—and then do the same for the week ahead. If you don't *have* to be at an upcoming meeting, for example, bow out and free up the hour; if you're ordering the same household products each week, set up regular delivery. Be



What Managers Can Do

The greatest force for retaining and engaging working parents? Managers on the front lines. Here are things leaders should know and do to support the mothers and fathers driving their teams' performance.

Understand the demographic. Working parents come in all packages: male and female; biological, adoptive, and foster; straight and LGBTQ; raising children of all ages. All need—and deserve—the same organizational and managerial support.

Demonstrate personal commitment. Keep pictures of your own family, including children if you have them,

visible in your workspace. Allow access to your calendar so the team can see your personal obligations. Send a clear message that it's OK to be family-focused and that you yourself are.

Publicize company benefits. The emergency backup care your organization sponsors won't help keep people on the job unless they know about it and know how to use it. Stay current on available resources and make sure working parents in your group are informed, too.

Coach and mentor using open-ended questions. A simple "What do you think it will be like when you return from leave?" or "How are

things going?" can launch a productive, solutions-focused conversation.

Minimize beginning- and end-of-day commitments. Schedule internal or elective meetings outside the hours in which parents need to handle caregiving transitions. (You're not lowering expectations for participation—just shifting them.)

Be an informal connector. Introduce the expectant father on your team to colleagues who have taken paternity leave. Host a lunch for parents in the department to swap tips about work travel. People will feel supported and gain practical "what works here" advice.

ruthless—and look for themes. Maybe you have a hard time declining volunteer requests from the kids' school, or you routinely run too many revisions on the quarterly budget numbers.

Practically, this exercise can create some much-needed slack in your calendar and shorten your to-do list. Emotionally, it gives you a sense of agency: You're being proactive and taking charge. And the personal insights that come out of it ("I say yes too often"; "I can be a perfectionist") help you make more-conscious judgments about your time and your commitments for the future.

Framing. To make any working-parent communication easier and more effective, think of yourself as putting it inside a frame, defined on four sides by your *priorities*, *next steps*, *commitment*, and *enthusiasm*.

Let's say it's a particularly hectic afternoon at work, but you need to duck out of the office for your daughter's ballet recital. Tell colleagues, "I'm leaving now for my daughter's recital, but I'll be back at 3:30. I'll tackle the marketing summary then, so we have a fresh version to review tomorrow. I'm looking forward to getting this in front of the client!"

A statement like that will work much better than a sheepish "I'm headed out for a few hours," because it brings listeners into your full professional and personal plan, allays any concerns about progress on pressing work, and showcases your dedication to the team. You've taken control of your own narrative and kept it positive and authentic, while minimizing the chance of misunderstandings.

Using "today plus 20 years" thinking. As a professional, you probably have incentives to focus on the intermediate term: You're rewarded for completing that six-month project, meeting your annual revenue targets, and delivering a compelling three-year strategy plan. But as a working mother or father, that time horizon is emotionally treacherous; it's where much of the working-parent downside sits and where the potential sense of loss looms largest. If you're just back from parental leave, for example, sitting miserably at your desk and missing the baby, it can be crushing to think forward six months or a year.

So try this instead when you're feeling conflicted or confronting the loss challenge: Think very short term and very long term—at the same time. Yes, you do miss the baby terribly right now, but you'll be home to see her in a few hours—and years from now you know you'll have provided her with a superb example of tenacity, career commitment, and hard work. In other words, acknowledge the reality and depth of your current feelings, identify a point of imminent relief, and then project far forward, to ultimate, positive outcomes.

Revisiting and recasting. Most of us have deeply ingrained views of who we are as professionals and how we wish to



We can all gain more calm, confidence, and control, thereby strengthening our ability to succeed at—and even enjoy—working parenthood.

be known. But it's important to revisit and update the details of those identities and brands after becoming parents. If responsiveness has always been a key part of your identity, for example, now during family dinner you're likely to feel torn: irresponsible if you ignore your smartphone and guilt-ridden as a parent if you check it. What used to be a positive career differentiator has become a classic no-win situation, and you've lost both pride in your professional self and the happy moment of being an engaged mom or dad, eating with the kids.

To be clear, recasting doesn't mean lowering your standards; it means defining important new ones. To help in the process, try completing the following sentences: "I am a working-parent professional who..."; "I prioritize work responsibilities when..."; and "My kids come before work when..." Through this exercise, you may decide that instead of putting so much weight on being responsive, you choose to think of yourself as an efficient, thoughtful, or articulate communicator—and you may vow that barring a work emergency, your kids take precedence during dinner.

Putting It All Together


Remember Jacob, the expectant father? Like most working parents, he was feeling the pressures of multiple core challenges, and he wanted to contain their impact on his upcoming parental leave and eventual return to work. He began by *framing* his conversations with clients: announcing his impending absence, previewing his time out of the office, reiterating his dedication, and describing how his team would see critical

advisory projects through. To Jacob's surprise, the message was warmly received; it even allowed him to deepen and personalize several relationships that had previously been all business. Next, after carefully *auditing* his post-leave calendar, Jacob determined that a number of his work meetings in faraway cities could be done remotely, freeing up additional precious time to spend with his little girl. (Later, when he *was* on the road, he reminded himself that the trip was short and the return home would be joyous—and that his career success would help ensure a stable financial future for the entire family.) During his month at home, he and his wife also anticipated and *rehearsed* their caregiving plans, deciding that they would ask for supplemental help from family members on the days she was on call. Several months into working fatherhood, Jacob reported being busier than ever but feeling in charge and on track.

As for Gabriela, she concluded that in trying to be all things to all people, she had taken on too much. *Recasting* her identity as "future partner in the firm and devoted mom" helped her identify commitments that didn't align with either role. She kept all her investor responsibilities, continued leaving the office at the same time, and went to the pediatrician's when needed. But she quietly began cutting back on internal work—such as organizing the firm's annual retreat—and she limited her volunteerism at the kids' school to one event per semester. The professional-recasting process also gave her the time, clarity, and confidence to prepare for effective conversations with her managers, in which she better *framed* her ambitions and desired schedule.

Connie realized that the combination of job pressures and her son's impending departure for college had created new challenges in her working-parent life. Together, we came up with a plan to mitigate the effects on her personally and professionally. After *auditing* her calendar and her to-dos, she delegated several recurring tasks to more-junior members of her team and dedicated the hours saved to a weekly evening outing with her son. When college-application and work deadlines collided, she used *framing* techniques to calmly explain her time out of the office to her colleagues instead of snapping at them, and she used the "*today plus 20 years*" tool to put her situation into perspective. Additionally, when her son was away visiting colleges, Connie *rehearsed* her evenings and weekends as an empty nester. With new habits in place, her stress subsided.

WORKING PARENTHOOD ISN'T EASY.

It's a big, complex, emotional, chronic, and sometimes all-consuming struggle. But as with any challenge, the more you break it down, the less daunting it becomes. With a clearer view of the issues you're facing, and with specific strategies for managing them, you'll be better able to succeed at work—and be the mother or father you want to be at home. 

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Daisy Dowling is the founder and CEO of *Workparent*, the executive coaching and training firm, and the author of *Workparent: The Complete Guide to Succeeding on the Job, Staying True to Yourself, and Raising Happy Kids* (HBR Press, 2021).



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What's Really Holding Women Back?

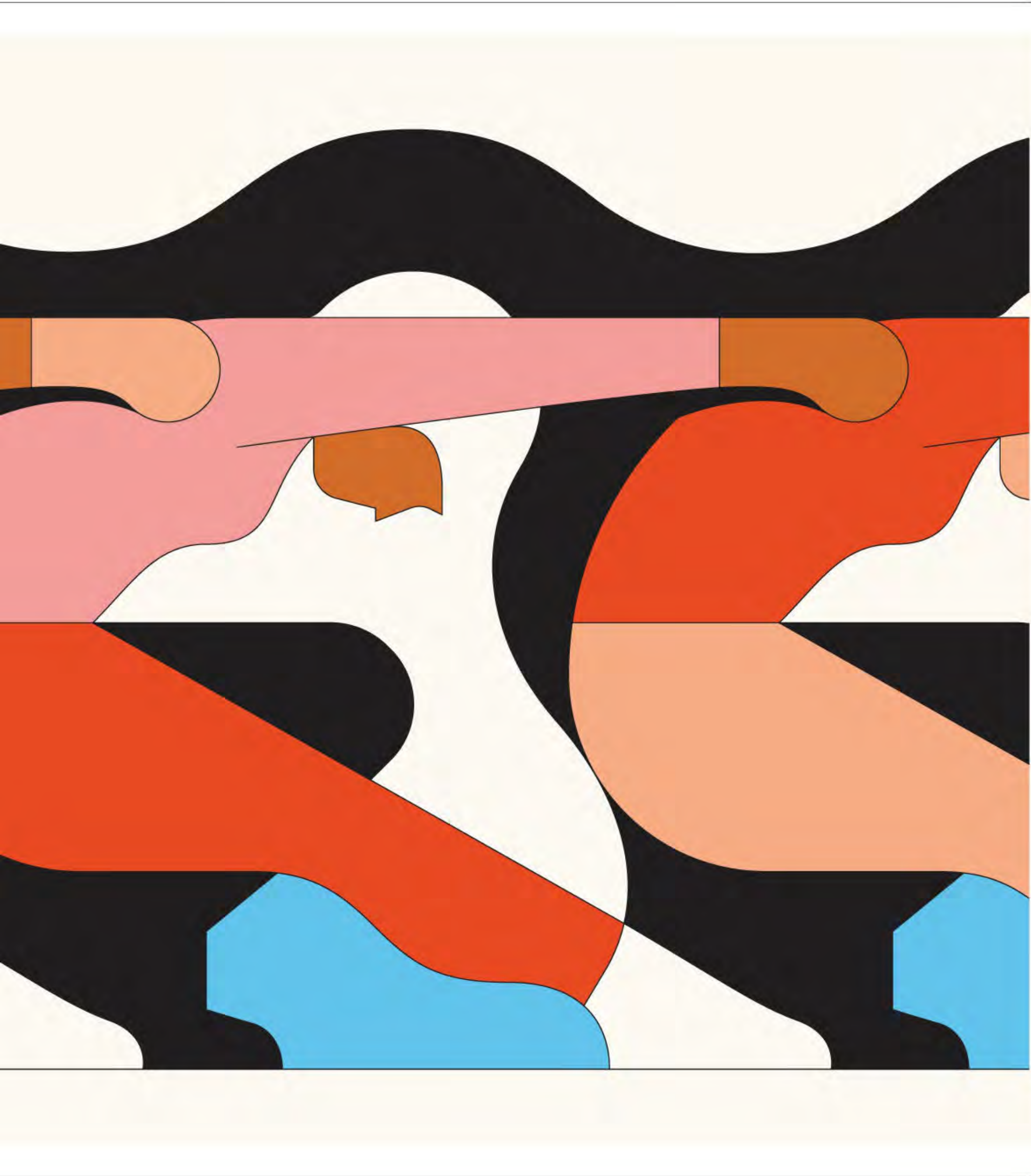
It's *not* what most people think.

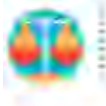
→ by ROBIN J. ELY and IRENE PADAVIC

AS SCHOLARS OF GENDER INEQUALITY in the workplace, we are routinely asked by companies to investigate why they are having trouble retaining women and promoting them to senior ranks. It's a pervasive problem. Women made remarkable progress accessing positions of power and authority in the 1970s and 1980s, but that progress slowed considerably in the 1990s and has stalled completely in this century.

Ask people *why* women remain so dramatically underrepresented, and you will hear from the vast majority a lament—an unfortunate but inevitable “truth”—that goes something like this: High-level jobs require extremely long hours, women's devotion to family makes it impossible for them to put in those hours, and their careers suffer as a result. We call this explanation the work/family narrative. In a 2012 survey of more than 6,500 Harvard Business School alumni from many different industries, 73% of men and 85% of women invoked it to explain women's stalled advancement. Believing this explanation doesn't mean it's true, however, and our research calls it seriously into question.







We heard this explanation a few years ago from a global consulting firm that, having had no success with off-the-shelf solutions, sought our help in understanding how its culture might be hampering its women employees. The firm recruits from elite colleges and MBA programs and ranks near the top of lists of prestigious consultancies, but like most other professional services firms, it has few female partners.

We worked with the firm for 18 months, during which time we interviewed 107 consultants—women and men, partners and associates. Virtually everybody resorted to some version of the work/family narrative to explain the paucity of female partners. But as we reported last year with our colleague Erin Reid, the more time we spent with people at the firm, the more we found that their explanations didn't correspond with the data. Women weren't held back because of trouble balancing the competing demands of work and family—men, too, suffered from the balance problem and nevertheless advanced. Women were held back because, unlike men, they were encouraged to take accommodations, such as going part-time and shifting to internally facing roles, which derailed their careers. The real culprit was a general culture of overwork that hurt both men and women and locked gender inequality in place.

What People Told Us— and What the Data Showed

On several dimensions, the firm's data revealed a reality very different from the story employees told us—and were telling themselves. The disconnects we

observed made us question why the story had such a powerful grip—even on the firm's data-minded analysts, who should have recognized it as a fiction.

Consider retention. Although one of the firm's motives for reaching out to us was that it wanted help addressing "women's higher turnover rate," when we took a careful look at its data for the preceding three years, we discovered virtually no difference in turnover rates for women and men.

Another disconnect: Whereas firm members attributed distress over work/family conflict primarily to women, we found that many men were suffering, too. "I was traveling three days a week and seeing my children once or twice a week for 45 minutes before they went to bed," one told us. He recalled a particularly painful Saturday when he told his son he couldn't come to his soccer game. "He burst into tears," the man said. "I wanted to quit then and there." Two-thirds of the associates we talked to who were fathers reported this kind of work/family conflict, but only one was taking accommodations to ease it.

Accommodations were another area in which the firm's narrative and its data didn't line up. Employees who took advantage of them—virtually all of whom were women—were stigmatized and saw their careers derailed. The upshot for women at the individual level was sacrifices in power, status, and income; at the collective level, it meant the continuation of a pattern in which powerful positions remained the purview of men. Perversely, in its attempt to solve the problem of women's stalled advancement, the firm was perpetuating it.

We also found incongruities within the work/family rhetoric itself. Take the way this man summed up the problem: "Women are going to have kids and not want to work, or they are going to have kids and might want to work but won't want to travel every week and live the lifestyle that consulting requires, of 60- or 70-hour weeks." Resolute in his conviction that women's personal preferences were the obstacle to their success, he was unable to account for such anomalies as childless women, whose promotion record was no better than that of mothers. In his calculation *all* women were mothers, a conflation that was common in our interviews. Childless women figured nowhere in people's remarks, perhaps because they contradict the work/family narrative.

In a final disconnect, many of those we spoke with described experiences that called into question the work/family narrative's foundational premise: that 24/7 work schedules are unavoidable. They talked about devoting long hours to practices that were costly and unnecessary, chief among them overselling and overdelivering. We heard many stories of partners who, as one associate put it, "promise the client the moon" without thinking of how much time and energy it takes to deliver on such promises. The pitch goes like this, he explained: "We'll do X, Y, and Z, and we're going to do it all in half the time that you think it should take." Clients are wowed and can't wait to sign up, he told us.

Associates felt pressured to go along with these demands for overwork because they wanted to stand out as stars amid their highly qualified colleagues. "We do these crazy slide decks that take

■ For the firm to address its gender problem, it would have to address its long-hours problem. And the way to start would be to stop overselling and overdelivering.

hours and hours of work,” one said. “It’s this attitude of, ‘I’m going to kill the client with a 100-slide deck.’ But the client can’t use all that!” Another associate ruefully described all the weekends she had devoted to these sorts of tasks. “I just worked really, really hard,” she told us, “and sacrificed family stuff, sacrificed my health for it, and at the end of the day, I look back on it, ‘Well, did we really have to do that? Probably not.’”

We pointed out these disconnects to the firm’s leaders, challenging the work/family narrative as oversimplified and offering a broader, more-nuanced, and data-driven explanation: What really held women back was the crushing culture of overwork at the firm. The unnecessarily long hours were detrimental to everyone, we explained, but they disproportionately penalized women because, unlike men, many of them take accommodations, which exact a steep career price.

All this led us to what we felt was an inescapable conclusion: For the firm to address its gender problem, it would have to address its long-hours problem. And the way to start would be to stop overselling and overdelivering.

The leaders reacted negatively to this feedback. They continued to maintain that women were failing to advance because they had difficulty balancing work and family, and they insisted that any solution had to target women specifically. Unable to convince them otherwise, we were at a loss for how to help, and the engagement effectively ended.

But we kept thinking about the situation. The firm’s leaders were smart, empirically minded, and well-meaning, and yet they had dismissed the data and

clung reflexively to an empirically dubious belief in the work/family narrative. As thoughtful as they were, it was a puzzle why they continued to rely on a “solution” that only perpetuated the problem.

The firm was not atypical in this regard. Research shows that a 24/7 culture creates discontent for women and men alike and that the “accommodations” solution, ironically, tends to derail the careers of highly qualified women, leaving companies’ senior ranks depleted of some of their brightest female stars. Studies show an additional irony: Long hours don’t raise productivity. In fact, they have been associated with decreases in performance and increases in sick-leave costs.

Considering those downsides, we asked: Why do companies continue on the same work/life balance path and disregard the possibility of instituting more-humane work hours?

We suspected that in the answer lay something profound but hidden—not just at our client firm but in corporate culture generally. Perhaps the work/family narrative is so pervasive and tenacious because it feeds into an elaborate system of social and psychological defenses that protect both women and men from the disturbing emotions that arise from the demand for long work hours. We decided to investigate.

Unconscious Psychological Defenses and Universal Beliefs

We returned to our interviews, this time paying special attention not only to *what* interviewees had said (or hadn’t) but also to *how* they had said it. The exercise was illuminating. Consciously or



Idea in Brief

THE PROBLEM

To explain why women are still having trouble accessing positions of power and authority in the workplace, many observers point to the challenge of managing the competing demands of work and family. But the data doesn’t support that narrative.

THE RESEARCH

The authors conducted a long-term study of beliefs and practices at a global consulting firm. The problem, they found, was not the work/family challenge itself but a general culture of overwork in which women were encouraged to take career-derailing accommodations to meet the demands of work and family.

THE WAY FORWARD

This culture of overwork punishes not just women but also men, although to a lesser degree. Only by recognizing and addressing the problem as one that affects all employees will we have a chance of achieving workplace equality.

One “push” factor was the poor reputation of female partners with children. We heard them described as “horrible” women who were not “positive role models of working moms.”

unconsciously, virtually all the employees we had talked to revealed that they were emotionally conflicted by the firm’s relentless demand for 24/7 availability and the daily choices that demand forced them to make between family and work. The unease thus created set the stage for protective measures to kick in—measures that would keep the firm’s leaders from having to face up to the devil’s choice they were handing their employees, and employees from having to face up to the price of whichever choice they made.

The linchpin of those protective measures was a belief in women’s natural fitness for family, and in men’s for work. At the employee level, they appeared as unconscious psychological defense mechanisms that reinforced the gendered work/family split. At the organizational level, they emerged as the universally held belief in the work/family narrative and in the form of policies that, as with accommodations, effectively took women off the partnership path. These employee-level and firm-level dynamics operated together to create the firm’s social defense system.

All parties benefited from these measures in the short run. Firm leaders could deflect responsibility for the lack of women partners on the grounds that it was inescapable. Employees could make some semblance of peace with their decisions: Men could justify as inevitable the sacrifices they’d made in ratcheting up at work, and women could justify as natural the sacrifices they’d made in ratcheting down. And all the while, the firm’s long-hours culture remained unchallenged.

But as with all defensive maneuvers, this social defense system didn’t fully

work. Conflict relegated to the unconscious merely hides; it isn’t resolved, and anxieties continually poke through to conscious awareness, experienced differently among women than among men.

The Problem for Men

In a long-hours work culture, men have one primary identity: that of an ideal worker, fully committed and fully available. To fit this image, they must adopt the psychological stance of “my job is all-important.” Nonwork identities, no matter how personally meaningful, become contingent and secondary. Naturally, this imperative to be an ideal worker generates internal conflict, especially for parents.

The men we talked to clearly felt guilty about how little time they spent with their families. They spoke poignantly about their deep emotional attachment to them, told us how much they regretted the time spent away from them, and described in heart-wrenching detail their interactions with disappointed children.

Men employed one key psychological tactic to manage these emotions: They split off their guilt and sadness, projected those feelings onto women at the firm, and identified with them there, at a bit of a remove. Consider the psychological jujitsu one man performed as he drew on the work/family narrative to explain women’s lack of advancement in the firm. “I believe deeply in my heart and soul that women encounter different challenges,” he said. “There’s the collusion of society that it’s the woman who takes the extended maternity leave, and there are some biological imperatives,

too. When my first child was born, I got to carry her from the delivery room to the nursery. It’s almost like I could feel the chemicals releasing in my brain. I fell so chemically, deeply, in love with my daughter. I couldn’t imagine a world without her. I mean, here it was in [just] the first eight minutes of her life. So I can understand, ‘How can I possibly give this up and go back to work?’”

But back to work he went. And what was his takeaway from this emotionally charged experience? A sense that he better understood the difficulties *women* face in trying to balance work and family! To banish his guilt and sadness about returning to his highly demanding work-weeks, he projected his intense emotional experience onto the women at the firm—a move that allowed him to let go of those feelings while still identifying with them.

Let’s unpack his story. He started with a distinction between women and men, linking motherhood to biology. It is women, not men, he suggested, who have the parenting experience. He abruptly changed course to speak about his own intensely emotional and biologically determined parenting experience but then changed course again, distancing himself from that experience and projecting it onto women. In effect, he was saying, “I was having this experience, but it was transient, and now that I’ve sampled it, now that I’ve been a tourist in this emotional land, I have a way to understand what is happening to women.” The emotions he had experienced, in other words, were no longer his. They now belonged to women.

At that point he shifted the conversation to the male-dominated world of work. He told us about his time in the



beer industry, a domain that, as he put it, consists of “men slapping each other on the back and talking about golf and s--- like that.” In his telling, there was no room in this domain for the emotional experience of parenting, which he implicitly relegated to the world of women. Men and women, he said, just have different commitments to work and family. “I can’t think of a single instance,” he told us, “where the fella took a six-month paternity leave to care for the baby while mom went back to work.”

This man was not alone in setting up women as the organizational bearers of distress about curtailed family time. That psychological defense gave many men at the firm the illusion of a fulfilled life and enabled them to perform as the committed workers the firm valorized. But the defense was only a Band-Aid; reality—the on-the-ground, relentless demands of family—was not so easily banished.

The Problem for Women

Women experience a different psychic tension. According to the work/family narrative and broader cultural notions, their commitment to family is primary by nature, so their commitment to work *has* to be secondary. They are expected to embrace an intensive, “my family is all-important” approach to parenting, a stance encouraged by the firm’s readily accessible accommodations. But a family-first stance comes at a significant cost to their careers and flies in the face of their professional ambitions.

Most of the firm’s women had tasted professional success and resisted the idea that they belonged at home, which made this tension especially acute. They

willingly complied with the family-devotion schema but struggled openly with the idea of splitting off the work component of their identities.

That ambivalence is clear in the account of one mother, who talked about her inability to shirk responsibilities on the home front despite having a family-oriented husband. “There’s just a difference between the way a mother and a father look at their kids and the sense of responsibility that they feel,” she told us. “I feel my male counterparts can more easily disconnect from what’s happening at home....If I did sort of disconnect, things wouldn’t fall apart, but I wouldn’t feel good about it, so it’s just not going to happen.” Yet her work commitment was also strong, leaving her at a loss for knowing whether her family responsibilities would allow her the space to develop professionally. “I know I’ll fall down from time to time,” she said. “I know I need to learn...I don’t doubt myself....It’s more from a place of needing to learn and needing to grow. I doubt myself generally in being able to honor that while also honoring the commitments I’ve made to my family. That is a constant worry.” The ambivalence she felt about her career is on full display here. She embraced her family identity but was unwilling to relinquish her work identity, which is why she could say that she didn’t doubt herself but then go on to say that she did.

Many other women at the firm similarly struggled with the work/family narrative’s injunction to reject the role of ambitious professional. This meant that they weren’t able to reap all its psychological benefits as a social defense. They willingly complied with the

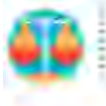
cultural dictate that they become the primary family caregiver, allowing men to identify vicariously with that split-off aspect of themselves—but they didn’t shed their work identities. Thus the psychological resolution that men found, having made the “right” choice in fully committing themselves to a work identity, was unavailable to women, who had made the “wrong” choice in not fully committing themselves to a family identity. Working women in this situation are left with identities constructed as contradictory, forcing them to constantly assess whether they should ratchet down their career aspirations.

Adding to this tension at the firm were regular reminders that women were in the wrong place by being at work instead of at home—“push” factors that women had to withstand if they wanted to retain their work identities as ambitious professionals.

The Power of “Push” Factors

One particularly strong push factor that women encounter is work/family accommodations. Going part-time or shifting to internally facing roles provides an enticing off-ramp from the path of overwork, but those moves stigmatize women and derail their careers. Female associates at the firm who took accommodations generally fell off the track to partner; female partners who took them veered away from the route to real power.

Many women at the firm described having to resist a second push factor: the pressure to give up what they saw as their relational style in favor of the hard-charging “masculine” style the



firm venerated in client interactions. One female partner told us how an early mentor warned that relying on her well-honed relationship-building skills would communicate to prospective clients that “you don’t have a lot going on between your ears.” In other words, her skill set didn’t cut the mustard. Such assessments loosened women’s identification with work while affirming a style more commonly associated with men, further encouraging women to step back.

A third push factor was the poor reputation of female partners with children, whose mothering was roundly condemned. These were formidable women who had held fast to their professional identities and achieved much recognition and success—achievements contradicting the idea that it is impossible to meet the demands of both work and family. One could imagine their being held up as exemplars, but we heard them routinely described as bad mothers—“horrible” women who were not “positive role models of working moms.” For junior women facing decisions about being good mothers and having successful careers, such condemnation implies that professional commitment exacts a terrible cost.


With these push factors constantly reminding women that they don’t really belong in the workplace, it’s no wonder that women are often ambivalent about their career commitments. When faced with the long-hours problem, they find themselves on the horns of a dilemma: If they respond to the pull of family by taking accommodations, they undermine their status at work, but if they refuse accommodations in favor of their professional ambitions, they undermine their status as good mothers. Thus they are

positioned to be seen as subpar performers or subpar mothers—or both. This dilemma leaves the culture of overwork intact, allows firms to deflect responsibility for women’s stalled advancement, and locks gender inequality in place. Women are the ones who have a work/family problem to sort out, the story goes, and that’s just the way it is.

SOCIAL DEFENSE SYSTEMS are insidious. They divert attention from a core anxiety-provoking problem by introducing a less-anxiety-provoking one that can serve as a substitute focus. At our client firm, the core problem was the impossibly long work hours, and the substitute problem was the firm’s inability to promote women. By presenting work/family accommodations as the solution to the substitute problem, the firm added to an invisible and self-reinforcing social-defense system—one that cloaked inefficient work practices in the rhetoric of necessity while perpetuating gender disparities. This move gave firm leaders an unresolvable and therefore always available problem to worry about, which in turn allowed everybody to avoid confronting the core problem. As a result, two strongly held ideologies supporting the status quo remained in place: Long work hours are necessary, and women’s stalled advancement is inevitable.

Our findings align with a growing consensus among gender scholars: What holds women back at work is not some unique challenge of balancing the demands of work and family but rather a general problem of overwork that prevails in contemporary corporate culture.

Women and men alike suffer as a result. But women pay higher professional

costs. If we want to solve this problem, we must reconsider what we’re willing to allow the workplace to demand of all employees. Such a reconsideration is possible. As individual families and employees push back against overwork, they will pave the way for others to follow. And as more research shows the business advantage of reasonable hours, some employers will come to question the wisdom of grueling schedules. If and when those forces gain traction, neither women nor men will feel the need to sacrifice the home or the work domain, demand for change will swell, and women may begin to achieve workplace equality with men. 

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How Dual-Career Couples Make It Work

Successful partnerships sidestep predictable traps and master three challenging transitions.

→ by JENNIFER PETRIGLIERI

CAMILLE AND PIERRE MET in their early forties after each one's marriage had ended. Both were deeply committed to their careers and to their new relationship. Camille, an accountant, had felt pressured by her ex-husband to slow her progress toward partnership at her firm. Pierre, a production manager at an automotive company, was embroiled in a bitter divorce from his wife, who had given up her career to accommodate the geographic moves that his required. (As with the other couples I've profiled in this article, these aren't their real

names.) Bruised by their past experiences, they agreed to place their careers on an equal footing. Initially things went smoothly, but two years in, Camille began to feel trapped on a professional path that she realized she had chosen because "that was what the smart kids did."

Mindful of their pact, Pierre calmly listened to her doubts and encouraged her to explore alternatives. But as the months wore on, he began to feel weighed down as he juggled providing emotional support to Camille, navigating their complex family logistics (both had

children from their former marriages), and succeeding in his demanding job. When he began to question his own career direction, he wondered how the two of them could manage to change course. They couldn't afford to take time out from work, nor could they take much time to reflect and keep their family and relationship afloat. Frustrated and exhausted, both wondered how they could continue to find meaning and fulfillment in their lives.

Dual-earner couples are on the rise. According to Pew Research, in 63% of couples with children in the United States, for example, both partners work (this figure is slightly higher in the EU). Many of these are *dual-career couples*: Both partners are highly educated, work full-time in demanding professional or managerial jobs, and see themselves on an upward path in their roles. For these couples, as for Pierre and Camille, work is a primary source of identity and a primary channel for ambition. Evidence is mounting from sociological research that when both partners dedicate themselves to work and to home life, they reap benefits such as increased economic freedom, a more satisfying relationship, and a lower-than-average chance of divorce.

Because their working lives and personal lives are deeply intertwined, however, dual-career couples face unique challenges. How do they decide whose job to relocate for, when it's OK for one partner to make a risky career change, or who will leave work early to pick up a sick child from school? How can they give family commitments—and each other—their full attention while both of them are working in demanding



roles? And when one of them wants to undertake a professional reinvention, what does that mean for the other? They must work out these questions together, in a way that lets both thrive in love and work. If they don't, regrets and imbalances quickly build up, threatening to hinder their careers, dissolve their relationship, or both.

Many of these challenges are well recognized, and I've previously written in HBR about how companies can adapt their talent strategies to account for some of them ("Talent Management and the Dual-Career Couple," May–June 2018). But for the couples themselves, little guidance is available. Most advice treats major career decisions as if one is flying solo, without a partner, children, or aging parents to consider. When it's for couples, it focuses on their relationship, not how that intersects with their professional dreams, or it addresses how to balance particular trade-offs, such as careers versus family, or how to prioritize partners' work travel. What couples need is a more comprehensive approach for managing the moments when commitments and aspirations clash.

My personal experience in a dual-career couple, and my realization that little systematic academic research had been done in this area, prompted a six-year investigation into the lives of more than 100 dual-career couples, resulting in my forthcoming book, *Couples That Work*. The people I studied come from around the world, range in age from mid-twenties to mid-sixties, and represent a range of professions, from corporate executive to entrepreneur to worker in the nonprofit sector. (See the sidebar "About the Research.") My research revealed

that dual-career couples overcome their challenges by directly addressing deeper psychological and social forces—such as struggles for power and control; personal hopes, fears, and losses; and assumptions and cultural expectations about the roles partners should play in each other's lives and what it means to have a good relationship or career.

I also discovered that three transition points typically occur during dual-career couples' working and love lives, when those forces are particularly strong. It is during these transitions, I found, that some couples craft a way to thrive in love and work, while others are plagued by conflict and regret. By understanding each transition and knowing what questions to ask each other and what traps to avoid, dual-career couples can emerge stronger, fulfilled in their relationships and in their careers.

TRANSITION 1 **Working as a Couple**

When Jamal and Emily met, in their late twenties, trade-offs were the last thing on their minds. They were full of energy, optimistic, and determined to live life to the fullest. Jamal, a project manager in a civil engineering firm, traveled extensively for work and was given increasingly complex projects to lead, while Emily, who worked at a clothing company, had just been promoted to her first management role. They saw each other mostly on weekends, which they often spent on wilderness hiking adventures. They married 18 months after their first date.

Then, in the space of three months, their world changed dramatically. While

Emily was pregnant with their first child, Jamal's boss asked him to run a critical infrastructure project in Mexico. Jamal agreed to spend three weeks out of every month in Mexico City; designating some of his pay raise to extra child care would allow Emily to keep working in Houston, where they lived. But when their daughter, Aisha, was born two weeks early, Jamal was stuck in the Mexico City airport waiting for a flight home. Soon Emily, who was single-handedly managing Aisha, her job, and their home, discovered that the additional child care wasn't enough; she felt overburdened and unappreciated. Jamal was exhausted by the relentless travel and the stress of the giant new project; he felt isolated, incompetent, and guilty.

After many arguments, they settled on what they hoped was a practical solution: Because Jamal earned more, Emily took a smaller project role that she could manage remotely, and she and Aisha joined him in Mexico. But Emily felt disconnected from her company's head office and was passed over for a promotion, and eventually she grew resentful of the arrangement. By the time Jamal's boss began talking about his next assignment, their fighting had become intense.

The first transition that dual-career couples must navigate often comes as a response to the first major life event they face together—typically a big career opportunity, the arrival of a child, or the merger of families from previous relationships. To adapt, the partners must negotiate how to prioritize their careers and divide family commitments. Doing so in a way that lets them both thrive requires an underlying shift: They must move from having parallel, independent

■ In the first transition that dual-career couples face, they must move from having parallel, independent careers and lives to having interdependent ones.

careers and lives to having interdependent ones.

My research shows two common traps for couples negotiating their way through their first transition:

Concentrating exclusively on the practical. In the first transition in particular, couples often look for logistical solutions to their challenges, as Jamal and Emily did when they arranged for extra child care and negotiated how many weekends Jamal would be home. This focus is understandable—such problems are tangible, and the underlying psychological and social tensions are murky and anxiety provoking—but it prolongs the struggle, because those tensions remain unresolved.

Instead of simply negotiating over calendars and to-do lists, couples must understand, share, and discuss the emotions, values, and fears underlying their decisions. Talking about feelings as well as practicalities can help them mitigate and manage them.

Basing decisions primarily on money. Many couples focus on economic gain as they decide where to live, whose career to prioritize, and who will do the majority of the child care. But as sensible (and sometimes unavoidable) as this is, it often means that their decisions end up at odds with their other values and desires.

Few people live for financial gain alone. In their careers they are also motivated by continual learning and being given greater responsibilities. Outside work, they want to spend time with their children and pursue personal interests. Couples may be attracted to a location because of proximity to extended family, the quality of life it affords, or their

ability to build a strong community.

Basing the decision to move to Mexico on Jamal's higher salary meant that he and Emily ignored their other interests, feeding their discontent.

Couples who are successful discuss the foundations and the structure of their joint path forward. First, they must come to some agreement on core aspects of their relationship: their values, boundaries, and fears. (See the sidebar "A Guide to Couple Contracting.") Negotiating and finding common ground in these areas helps them navigate difficult decisions because they can agree on criteria in advance. Doing this together is important; couples that make this arrangement work, I found, make choices openly and jointly, rather than implicitly and for each other. The ones I studied who had never addressed their core criteria struggled in later transitions, because those criteria never go away.

Next, couples must discuss how to prioritize their careers and divide family commitments. Striving for 50/50 is not always the best option; neither must one decide to always give the other's career priority.

There are three basic models to consider: (1) In *primary-secondary*, one partner's career takes priority over the other's for the duration of their working lives. The primary person dedicates more time to work and less to the family, and his or her professional commitments (and geographic requirements) usually come before the secondary person's. (2) In *turn taking*, the partners agree to periodically swap the primary and secondary positions. (3) In *double-primary*, they continually juggle two primary careers.



Idea in Brief

THE PROBLEM

When both members of a couple have demanding careers, their work and personal lives are deeply intertwined—and often at odds.

THE TRANSITIONS

Dual-career couples tend to go through three phases of being particularly vulnerable: when they first learn to work together as a couple; when they experience a midlife reinvention; and in the final stages of their working lives.

THE SOLUTION

Couples who communicate at each transition about values, boundaries, and fears have a good chance of being fulfilled both in their relationships and in their careers.

My research shows that couples can feel fulfilled in their careers and relationships whichever model they pursue, as long as it aligns with their values and they openly discuss and explicitly agree on their options. Couples who pursue the third option are often the most successful, although it's arguably the most difficult, precisely because they are forced to address conflicts most frequently.



About the Research

I studied 113 dual-career couples. They ranged in age from 26 to 63, with an even distribution among age groups. The majority of couples—76—were in their first significant partnership. Participants in the study came from 32 countries on four continents, and their ethnic and religious backgrounds reflected this diversity. At the time of the study, roughly 35% resided in North America, 40% in Europe, and 25% in the rest of the world. In 68 of the couples at least one partner had children. Eleven of the couples identified as gay, and the rest as straight. Just under 60% of the participants were pursuing careers in the corporate world. The others were spread roughly equally among the professions (such as medicine, law, and academia), entrepreneurship, government, and the nonprofit sector.

I interviewed the members of each couple separately, asking them about the development of their relationships, their career paths, their interactions as a couple, and their family and friend networks.

To work past their deadlock, Emily and Jamal finally discussed what really mattered to them beyond financial success. They identified pursuit of their chosen careers, proximity to nature, and a stable home for Aisha where they could both actively parent her. They admitted their fears of growing apart, and in response agreed to an important restriction: They would live in the same city and would limit work travel to 25% of their time. They agreed to place their geographic boundaries around North America, and Jamal suggested that they both draw circles on a map around the

cities where they felt they could make a home and have two careers. Their conversations and mapping exercise eventually brought them to a resolution—and a new start in Atlanta, where they would pursue a double-primary model. Three years later they are progressing in their careers, happy in their family life, and expecting a second child.

TRANSITION 2 Reinventing Themselves

Psychological theory holds that early in life many people follow career and personal paths that conform to the expectations of their parents, friends, peers, and society, whereas in their middle years many feel a pressing need for *individuation*, or breaking free of those expectations to become authors of their own lives. This tends to happen in people's forties, regardless of their relationship status, and is part of a process colloquially known as the midlife crisis.


We tend to think of a midlife crisis mostly in personal terms (a husband leaves his wife, for example, and buys a sports car), but in dual-career couples, the intense focus on professional success means that the partners' job tracks come under scrutiny as well. This combined personal and professional crisis forms the basis of the second transition. Camille and Pierre, whose story began this article, were in the midst of it.

As each partner wrestles with self-redefinition, the two often bump up against long-settled arrangements they have made and the identities, relationship, and careers they have crafted together. Some of those arrangements—whose career takes precedence, for

example—may need to be reconsidered to allow one partner to quit a job and explore alternatives. It may be painful to question the choices they made together during the previous transition and have since built their lives around. This can be threatening to a relationship; it's not uncommon for one partner to interpret the other's desire to rethink past career choices as an inclination to rethink the relationship as well, or even to potentially end it. Couples who handle this transition well find ways to connect with and support each other through what can feel like a very solitary process.

The second transition often begins—as it did for Camille and Pierre—when one partner reexamines a career or life path. That person must reflect on questions such as: What led me to this impasse? Why did I make the choices I made? Who am I? What do I desire from life? Whom do I want to become? He or she should also take time to explore alternative paths, through networking events, job shadowing, secondments, volunteer work, and so forth. Such individual reflection and exploration can lead couples to the first trap of the second transition:

Mistrust and defensiveness. Living with a partner who is absorbed in exploring new paths can feel threatening. Painful questions surface: Why is my partner not satisfied? Is this a career problem or a relationship problem? Am I to blame? Why does he or she need new people? Am I no longer enough? These doubts can lead to mistrust and defensiveness, which may push the exploring partner to withdraw further from the relationship, making the other even more mistrustful and defensive, until eventually the



Because previous generations retired earlier, didn't live as long, and didn't have access to the gig economy, many couples lack role models for what reinvention can look like.

relationship itself becomes an obstacle to individuation, rather than a space for it.

In such a situation, people should first be open about their concerns and let their partners reassure them that the angst is not about them or the relationship. Next, they should adopt what literary critics call *suspension of disbelief*—that is, faith that the things they have doubts about will unfold in interesting ways and are worth paying attention to. This attitude will both enrich their own lives and make their partners' exploration easier.

Finally, they should understand their role as supporters. Psychologists call this role in a relationship the *secure base* and see it as vital to the other partner's growth. Originally identified and described by the psychologist John Bowlby, the secure base allows us to stretch ourselves by stepping outside our comfort zone while someone by our side soothes our anxieties about doing so. Without overly interfering, supporters should encourage their partners' exploration and reflection, even if it means moving away from the comfortable relationship they've already established.

Being a secure base for a partner presents its own trap, however:

Asymmetric support. In some couples one partner consistently supports the other without receiving support in return. That's what happened to Camille and Pierre. Pierre's experience in his former marriage, in which his wife gave up her career for his, made him determined to support Camille, and he initially stepped up to be a secure base for her. Their lives were so packed, however, that Camille had trouble finding the energy to return the favor. The result was that

her exploration and reflection became an impediment to Pierre's, creating a developmental and relationship deadlock. It is important to remember that acting as a secure base does not mean annihilating your own wishes, atoning for past selfishness, or being perfect. You can be a wonderful supporter for your partner while requesting support in return and taking time for yourself. In fact, that will most likely make you a far better (and less resentful) supporter.

In my research I found that couples who make it through their second transition are those in which the partners encourage each other to do this work—even if it means that one of them is exploring and providing support at the same time.

Once the exploring partner has had a chance to determine what he or she wants in a career, a life, or a relationship, the next step is to make it happen—as a couple. Couples need to renegotiate the roles they play in each other's lives. Take Matthew and James, another pair I spoke with, who had risen through the professional ranks in their 18 years together. When Matthew realized that he wanted to get off what he called the success train—on which he felt like a mere passenger—both he and James had to let go of their identity as a power couple and revisit the career-prioritization agreement they had forged during their first transition. Initially Matthew was reluctant to talk to James about his doubts, because he questioned whether James would still love him if he changed direction. When they started discussing this, however, they realized that their identity as a power couple had trapped them in a dynamic in which both needed to succeed but neither could outshine the

other. Acknowledging and renegotiating this unspoken arrangement allowed James to shoot for his first senior executive position and Matthew to transition into the nonprofit sector. The time and care they took to answer their existential questions and renegotiate the roles they played in each other's lives set them up for a renewed period of growth in their careers and in their relationship.

TRANSITION 3

Loss and Opportunity

Attending her mother's funeral was one of the most difficult experiences of Norah's life. It was the culmination of two years of immense change for her and her husband, Jeremy, who were in their late fifties. The change began when their fathers unexpectedly passed away within five weeks of each other, and they became caregivers for Norah's ailing mother just as their children were leaving the nest and their own careers were in flux.

Jeremy is a digital visual artist. His studio's main projects were ending because a big client was moving on. Though he was sad, he had become confident enough to feel excited about whatever might come next. Norah had been working for the same small agricultural machinery business for 26 years; she had once wanted to change careers but felt that she couldn't do so while Jeremy was relying on her for emotional and logistical support. Now she was being asked to take an early retirement deal. She felt thrown on the scrap heap despite her long commitment to the company. No career, no parents, no children to care for—who was she now? She felt disoriented and adrift.



The third transition is typically triggered by shifting roles later in life, which often create a profound sense of loss. Careers plateau or decline; bodies are no longer what they once were; children, if there are any, leave home. Sometimes one partner's career is going strong while the other's begins to ebb. Having raced through decades of career growth and child-rearing, couples wake up with someone who may have changed since the time they fell in love. They may both feel that way. These changes again raise fundamental questions of identity: Who am I now? Who do I want to be for the rest of my life?

Although loss usually triggers it, the third transition heralds opportunity. Chances for late-in-life reinvention abound, especially in today's world. Life expectancy is rising across the globe, and older couples may have several decades of reasonably good health and freedom from intensive parenting responsibilities. As careers and work become more flexible, especially for those with experience, people can engage in multiple activities more easily than previous generations could—combining advisory or consulting work with board service, for example. Their activities often include giving back to the community, leaving some kind of legacy, mentoring younger generations, rediscovering passions of their youth, or dedicating themselves more to friendships.

Their task in the third transition is to again reinvent themselves—this time in a way that is both grounded in past accomplishments and optimistic about possibilities for the future. They must mourn the old, welcome the new, figure out how the two fit together, and adjust

their life path to support who they want to become.

One thing that struck me when I spoke to couples in their third transition is that it's most powerful when partners reinvent themselves together—not just reflecting jointly, as in the other transitions, but actually taking on a new activity or project side by side. When one is curious about a partner's life and work as well as one's own, an immense capacity for mutual revitalization is unlocked. I met many couples who were charting new paths out of this transition that involved a merging of their work—launching a new business together, for example.

The third transition also has its traps: **Unfinished business.** For better or for worse, earlier relational patterns, approaches, decisions, and assumptions will influence how a couple's third transition unfolds. I found that the most common challenge in managing this transition was overcoming regret about perceived failures in the way the partners had “worked” as a couple—how they had prioritized their careers, or how each partner had supported the other's development (or not).

To move through the third transition, couples must acknowledge how they got where they are and commit to playing new roles for each other in the future. For example, Norah and Jeremy had become stuck in a pattern in which Norah was Jeremy's supporter. By recognizing this—and both their roles in cementing it—they were able to become more mutually supportive.

Narrow horizons. By the time a couple reaches the third transition, they will probably have suffered their fair share of disappointments and setbacks.

They may be tired from years of taking care of others, or just from staying on the treadmill. As their roles shift and doubts about their identities grow, reinvention may be beyond consideration. In addition, because previous generations retired earlier, didn't live as long, and didn't have access to the gig economy, many couples lack role models for what reinvention can look like at this stage of life. If they don't deliberately broaden their horizons, they miss opportunities to discover themselves anew.

So couples must explore again. Even more than in the second transition, they need to flirt with multiple possibilities. Like healthy children, who are curious about the world, themselves, and those around them, they can actively seek new experiences and experiment, avoid taking things for granted, and constantly ask “Why?” Most of us suppress our childhood curiosity as life progresses and responsibilities pile up. But it is vital to overcome the fear of leaving behind a cherished self and allow ambitions and priorities to diversify. Exploring at this stage is rejuvenating.

Shifts in people's roles and identities offer a perfect excuse to question their current work, life, and loves. Many people associate exploring with looking for new options, which is surely important. But it's also about questioning assumptions and approaches and asking, “Is this really how things need to be?”

Having rebalanced their support for each other, Norah and Jeremy could open up to new possibilities. Having earned financial security from their previous work, they sought reinvention not only in their careers but also in their wider roles in the world. Encouraging

A Guide to Couple Contracting

Drawing on my research, I've developed a systematic tool to help dual-career couples who are facing any of the three transitions described in this article. I call it *couple contracting*, because to shape their joint path, partners must address three areas—values, boundaries, and fears—and find common ground in each. Values define the direction of your path, boundaries set its borders, and fears reveal the potential cliffs to avoid on either side. Sharing a clear view in these three domains will make it easier to negotiate and overcome the challenges you encounter together.

First, take some time on your own to write down your thoughts about each of the three areas. Then share your reflections with each other. Listen to and acknowledge each other's responses, resisting any temptation to diminish or discount your partner's fears. Next, note where you have

common ground and where your values and boundaries diverge. No couple has perfect overlap in those two areas, but if they are too divergent, negotiate a middle ground. If, for example, one of you could tolerate living apart for a period but the other could not, you'll need to shape a boundary that works for both of you.

Values

When our choices and actions align with our values, we feel content; when they don't, we feel stressed and unhappy. Openly discussing your values will make it easier to make choices that align with them. For example, if you and your partner know you both greatly value family time, you'll be clear that neither of you should take a job requiring 70-hour workweeks.

Questions to ask each other:

What makes you happy and proud? What gives you satisfaction? What makes for a good life?

Boundaries

Setting clear boundaries together allows you to make big decisions more easily. Consider three types of boundaries: place, time, and presence.

Questions to ask each other:

Are there places where you'd love to work and live at some point in your life? Are there places you'd prefer to avoid? Understanding that we may sometimes have to put in more hours than we'd like, how much work is too much? How would you feel about our taking jobs in different cities and living apart for a period? For how long? How much work travel is too much, and how will we juggle travel between us?

Fears

Monitoring each other's fears can help you spot trouble and take preventive action before your relationship enters dangerous territory. Many fears are endemic to relationships and careers: You may worry that your partner's

family will encroach on your relationship, that over time the two of you will grow apart, that your partner will have an affair, that you will have to sacrifice your career for your partner's, or that you may not be able to have children. But sharing these fears allows you to build greater empathy and support. If you know that your partner is worried about the role of your parents in your lives, for example, you are more likely to manage the boundary between them and your partnership sensitively. Likewise, if you are interested in a risky career transition but worried that financial commitments would prevent it, you might agree to cut back on family spending in order to build a buffer.

Questions to ask each other:


What are your concerns for the future? What's your biggest fear about how our relationship and careers interact? What do you dread might happen in our lives?

each other, they both transitioned to portfolio working lives. Jeremy became a freelance digital visual artist, took a part-time role teaching young art students at a local college, and dedicated more time to his passion of dinghy sailing. Norah retrained to be a counselor working with distressed families and began volunteering at a local agricultural museum. With these new opportunities and more time for each other and their friends, they felt newfound satisfaction with their work and with their relationship.

THE CHALLENGES COUPLES FACE at each transition are different but linked. In their first transition, the partners

accommodate to a major life event by negotiating the roles they will play in each other's lives. Over time those roles become constraining and spark the restlessness and questioning that lead to the second transition. To successfully navigate the third transition, couples must address regrets and developmental asymmetries left over from their first two transitions.

No one right path or solution exists for meeting these challenges. Although the 50/50 marriage—in which housework and child care are divided equally between the partners, and their careers are perfectly synched—may seem like a noble ideal, my research suggests

that instead of obsessively trying to maintain an even “score,” dual-career couples are better off being relentlessly curious, communicative, and proactive in making choices about combining their lives. 

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1. How Dual-Career Couples Can Work Through the Coronavirus Crisis

→ by JENNIFER PETRIGLIERI

A LITTLE MORE than two months after the start of China's coronavirus lockdown, just as restrictions began to ease, a startling new figure has emerged: The divorce rate in the city of Xi'an, the heart of the Shaanxi Province, has spiked. The numbers from Italy are not yet available, but the jokes abound. "You'll either come out of this with

a third child, or a divorce," quipped one of my Italian relatives as France, where my husband and I live, followed Italy into an open-ended lockdown. Four days into it, I can see why.

In my work researching dual-career couples I've seen how even with a lot on their plates, couples can thrive in both their careers

and their relationships. But now millions of dual-career couples across the world are, like us, finding themselves in a situation that a month ago seemed inconceivable and are navigating it without a road map: both partners forced into working full-time from home. Many of these couples also have to care for children full-time with

little or no support because of strict social-distance guidelines.

Work itself is much more stressful than usual—as our face-to-face work moves online, our organizations struggle to serve customers, and our job security itself becomes uncertain—so there is plenty of frustration and anxiety to take home. And now it is home: Our homes have become the spaces where we deal with these challenges. With no clear division of labor between paid work and housework, dual-career couples are facing a host of new and unfamiliar challenges. How can both partners work productively under the same roof? Who gets to use the home office, and when? How can we avoid falling into the trap of overwork and burnout that is prevalent among home workers? How can we deal with each other's mildly annoying habits that, when lived with 24/7, suddenly become bones of contention? And, for those who are also working parents, how do we keep the kids occupied and homeschooled, with no friends, grandparents, or paid childcare givers to help? Most of the advice I'm seeing in response to these questions suggests that couples need to focus on the practicalities: Schedule

If you understand why each other's work needs to take priority at certain moments, it's easier to accept the sacrifices you'll both have to make.

your days. Never work at the kitchen table. Close the door to your home office. Divide the chores. Talk to your boss. Alternate shifts between childcare and work. Take regular breaks. Don't lose sleep. Leverage technology.

These practicalities are clearly important, and all couples—indeed all workers—will need to make serious adjustments. But my six years of research has taught me that what determines which couples will go their separate ways when the crisis ends and which will have a second honeymoon period (and perhaps a third child to boot!) will not be how they deal with the practicalities. It's not about who will brave the pandemic to go out and buy milk.

Instead, my research—for which I've interviewed more than 100 couples—shows that the couples who survive crises with their relationship and careers intact are those who discuss and agree on certain principles as the crisis begins. These should capture what matters most to them, what they need and want to achieve, what they need from each other, and what they must give in return. These principles, once set in an agreement, drive the practical solutions they adopt as the crisis unfolds.

This “crisis deal” is based on the couples contract that I describe in my book *Couples That Work* as vital for all dual-career couples to thrive. But couples can't just set a contract once and be done: They must adjust the deal when major changes arrive—especially when a crisis hits.

It doesn't take long to figure out a crisis deal. You can do it tonight with your partner. First, take a few minutes individually to jot down your thoughts on each of the questions set out below. Consider a time horizon of three months (at this point we don't know how long the situation will last, but this is my educated guess based on China's experience). Once you've gathered and written down your own thoughts, share them with your partner point by point and work together to find common ground. Write down what you agree on. This will make your crisis deal a living deal that you can revisit every week to make sure you are on track. You can also look to the agreement as the basis for the practical problems that you will need to tackle next.

What matters most to you in this period? The easy answer for all of us is the health and safety of our loved ones. But beyond this, what are your top three goals for

this time? Is there a particular work project you want to see through to completion? A relationship you want to foster? Do you want to use the time at home to map out your next career transition? Is your kids' education top of mind?

Understanding and sharing these goals is important because it is the best guide to how to divide up your time. Most of us will be less productive on any given front during this period. But imagine yourself looking back three months from now: What are the yardsticks you will use to measure whether you spent your time wisely?

What is the relative priority of your careers over the coming months? If you're both working from home and simultaneously managing other commitments like caring for children or older parents, you will need to figure out whose work gets priority when. Do you have a stable deal in which one of your careers consistently takes priority over the other? Do you try to maintain a 50/50 split? Or are there certain weeks when one of you will need to have priority over working time?

My research has shown that any one of these arrangements can work—but it works

best if you decide in advance which one you're following. This can give you some logic to use as you split up each day's working hours between you. If you understand why each other's work needs to take priority at certain moments, it's easier to accept the sacrifices you'll both have to make in this period without building up resentments.

What are your parenting principles during this period? These are extraordinary times for working parents, and the principles we usually stick to will need to adapt. Do you need to loosen screen-time agreements? How involved in homeschooling do you want and need to be? What are the aspects of your children's lives that are most important to you? Outdoor time, reading time, sports, study? How will you talk about the crisis and contain your children's anxieties? If you and your partner are on the same page and can communicate these adjusted principles clearly to your children, it will make keeping the boundaries (and peace) at home a bit easier.

What do you need from each other to make this all work? We are all craving support, but what does that look like for you? Emotional

■ Adapting to your partner's needs demonstrates the goodwill and love we'll all need to make it through these times.

or practical? Do you need to know that you'll have 15 minutes of undivided attention every evening to check in and debrief the day? Do you need your partner to share some of the tasks that you usually take full responsibility for? What do you need from your partner to help you stick to your crisis deal? You will both probably need different things from each other. Adapting to your partner's needs demonstrates the goodwill and love we'll all need to make it through these times.

What concerns you the most? The crisis and the reality of working from home for an extended period provoke anxiety in most of us. Do you worry about your job security? Managing the boundaries between work and kids? Getting quality couple time? Is cabin fever setting in? What will you do if one or both of you become seriously ill? In times of crisis many of us adopt a stiff-upper-lip stance and bottle up our concerns. This is not helpful within a couple. Understanding each other's key concerns is critical, because it makes us more attentive and sensitive. And when we understand our partner's concerns, we can take practical steps to soothe or mitigate them.

Faced with a crisis, our focus often narrows to the immediate tasks at hand. As one woman I spoke to remarked: "It's easy for this situation to put you in task mode. I'm realizing, though, that we need to figure out a new deal to get through it." My research concurs: Couples that work are those who put their deal first. Only then do they move on to the practicalities.

As long as the principles you agreed to in your deal serve as the logic for your practicalities, and as long as you keep that conversation alive, you'll get through this period—and perhaps your relationship will be even stronger. Wedding bells may sound, a second honeymoon might get booked, or tiny clothes may get knitted—at which point you'll need to negotiate another deal!

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2. A Guide for Working (from Home) Parents

→ by AVNI PATEL THOMPSON

WESTEND61/GETTY IMAGES



AMIR AND RIA are working professionals living in Seattle: He works at Amazon, and she's the CEO of an early-stage start-up. They have two kids, Amara and Aryan, who are six and two years old. They're used to managing the usual challenges of dual working parents—coordinating childcare with schools and activities, managing meals and household chores,

and spending quality time together on the weekends.

Things all became more complicated this spring with the outbreak of Covid-19 in Seattle and its suburbs. First Amazon asked all employees to start working from home, and then a week later Amara's school announced they would be closing for four weeks, potentially more. Ria's office and Aryan's daycare closed soon after. Since then, Amir and Ria have been juggling full-time childcare for both kids and working from home while trying to preserve as much productivity as possible.

For the first week, they approached the situation like a vacation, with little structure around schedule or duties. This quickly turned into a frustrating situation for everyone. They weren't getting work done, they were worried about how much they were relying on a tablet to keep Amara entertained, and regular things like meals and cleaning seemed to be just piling up. Being all stuck together in a closed space just made it worse.

As a company that builds software to help working parents collaboratively run their families, we routinely gather the best practices of busy parents and have been polling families in Seattle,

San Francisco, and New York City that have already been experiencing this new normal.

Their experiences have taught us that inventing new ways to preserve old routines is key. Maintaining a sense of familiarity and consistency is both comforting and therapeutic in times of upheaval—and it's also practical. When you're going to be fighting for every inch of productivity, you want each day to feel like an established habit, no wasted time on wondering what's for lunch or when the family is going outside to play.

Here are three steps to bring your old plan into your new normal:

1. Maintain routines.

The first step is to keep the structure of the day the same as it has typically been. Beyond the benefits of familiarity, maintaining a regular schedule will give you firm guideposts for building your work and childcare schedules.

For one family we work with, their daily routine used to include breakfast at 8:15 AM for the kids and then a day of activities with the nanny after the parents left for work: an hour of free-play time, an outdoor adventure, lunch at home, and then a

mix of educational and craft activities before one more outdoor time. They ate dinner at 5 PM before the parents came home at 6 PM. In the evening they read books and played before bedtime at 7:30 or 8 PM.

I'd advise this family to keep their routine. Whether or not they still have the nanny, they should try to keep the meals, blocks of activity, and outdoor time. (I've personally used this approach when traveling with the family for extended periods.) You'll be creating the actual schedules in the next step, but the key first is identifying the foundation on the basis of what you already know.

2. Create modified schedules.

Next, build a schedule for each week that incorporates these routines at a high level but is modified to account for your work blocks and other new responsibilities: meals, chores, and childcare.

We've modified the "Sunday check-in" planning rundown we created for busy working parents specifically in these chaotic times, when planning out the week is even more important.

In your plans, make sure you've covered:

- Your kids' schedules

We need to find safe and responsible ways to help out one another while upholding our responsibilities at work and at home.

- What you will have for each meal
- Chores (laundry, dishes, tidying, cleaning)
- Key work meetings or times when it's critical you have someone to cover your work while you handle a household task

Put this information into a calendar and assign shifts and duties to specific family members. Our family has a Google calendar, and we've created a simple example that families can use to create their kids' schedules and add shifts on top.

Finally, create work blocks. Depending on your childcare, community, and quarantine situation, here are three ways to make this work:

A partner swap. Four-hour shifts in which one partner works and the other cares for kids.

Short shifts. 30-minute to two-hour shifts that rotate among some number of adults.

Video shifts. While you'll still need to be paying some attention, it's possible, especially with older kids, to organize virtual playdates (more on this below) or calls with grandparents that will keep them entertained while you're getting in a phone call

or doing some heads-down work.

It will feel like you need to squeeze every ounce of productivity out of every minute in the day. Many of us will have to work early in the morning or after the kids are in bed. But be sure to schedule in breaks and unstructured times to unwind and connect with your partner and kids. This is going to be a marathon, and it's important to find ways to not burn out.

3. Swap in new ways to do old things.

Finally, if your kids are used to having playdates or weekly activities, find ways to keep those events on the calendar, just in a new form. Everyone will appreciate the social time, and, as a bonus, it also can buy you 30 minutes of uninterrupted work time. Consider these options:

Virtual playdates. Choose Google Hangouts (or Zoom if you prefer) and send invites to the parents of your kids' friends. For the playdate itself, have a station set up in your house with a tablet, laptop, or Alexa Show/Facebook Portal ready to go. During the playdate, it can be as simple as the kids catching up and coloring together or one of the parents leading an activity or reading books.

Creative athletic activities for the kids.

Register your kids for free online classes like Cosmic Yoga, Art Hub for Kids, or Go Noodle. Schedule these during the times they might otherwise be doing after-school activities. They should get some exercise every day, too—this could even be just going into the backyard to do some soccer drills or play catch.

Parent pods. Find a group of three or four other families you're close with and create a shared pool of resources, whether it's meal plans, activity schedules, or lesson plans.

Book club or sports-viewing nights for you.

Staying social, active, and connected is just as important for the adults. If you don't already have one, create a book club or a sports/TV show viewing club. Put it into people's calendars and set up a video call so that everyone can watch together. Make sure to still get your workouts in with a run outside, an indoor circuit, or online options. Even a family walk around the block will do wonders.

We need to lean on our village now more than ever. The nature of this crisis requires that we find safe and

responsible ways to help out one another while upholding our responsibilities at work and at home. Lean on your village—the other parents in your community—to share responsibilities, looking out especially for those who might need extra help, such as health care or hourly workers left without childcare. Accept that things are not going to run completely smoothly and we aren't going to all be our 100% productive selves. But with tempered expectations, a flexible approach, and resourcefulness, you'll be amazed at how we can all adapt. With any luck, we'll emerge from this crisis even stronger and more collaborative: a modern take on an age-old approach to parenting.

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Avni Patel Thompson is the founder and CEO of Modern Village, whose mission is to lighten the invisible load of raising families through thoughtful, collaborative technology. She is a third-time founder building technology solutions for today's parents. Prior to taking the entrepreneurial plunge, she spent more than a decade building consumer businesses at P&G, adidas, and Starbucks.



3. Working Parents, Make Friendships a Part of Your Routine

→ by NEAL J. ROESE AND KYLE S.H. DOBSON

MONICA GENTLY TUCKS her two-year-old son Hudson into bed. She had just finished up work as a senior manager at a global bank. As she quietly closes the door to her son's bedroom, her mind flips back to the documents she still needs to review in preparation for an early meeting the next morning. She had hoped

to call a friend back first, but she just doesn't have the time (or energy) tonight.

For Monica and many other parents managing challenging careers, a fundamental struggle is balancing work versus family. Whether parenting toddlers or teenagers, working parents can find it difficult to divide their time

while still feeling successful and committed in both areas. Friendships barely register in this balancing act. That's a big problem. Basic research in psychology shows that friends are a key contributor to not only the mental well-being of working parents but their career success as well.

Friends matter. We share our innermost secrets with our closest friends, and we can count on them in an emergency. Research shows that close friendships are pivotal to both psychological and physical well-being. Close friendships bring stronger emotional well-being. Friends benefit our basic physiology, as shown by studies that link social connections to cellular-level protection against disease. For instance, we are less likely to catch a cold if we have a solid network of friends. Indeed, having a solid friendship network can reduce mortality as much as 50%. Friends also boost work performance. For one thing, friends (who do not work at your company) give you an "outside view" that can unlock new insights and open your eyes to broader perspectives. For another, friends are a stress reducer. A happy hour after work with friends after a challenging workday, even virtually, may calm the mind as well as the body.

Even if parents recognize the importance of their friends, it's all too easy to let those get-togethers fall to the bottom of the priority list. In fact, the time spent with friends drops steadily over our life span; from its peak in the teen years, the fastest decline happens in our 20s and



30s, which is precisely the age range in which children first enter our lives.

So what can we do?

Friendships are nurtured by simple shared experiences, like attending the same class, sweating at the gym together, or even using the same elevator in your apartment complex. So it is no surprise that friendships are reinforced through focused sharing—think book clubs and wine-tasting events. But staging these focused get-togethers is tough when you have children, and tougher still when your best friend lives on the other side of the continent—or the planet!

The solution we are exploring in our scholarly research is one we call bundling. Bundling is the creation of shared experience by combining, or bundling together, two friends' mundane life tasks. Rather than carving out unique time for a book club, pick a task that you do anyway on your own, like shopping for groceries, cooking dinner, or reading bedtime stories. Then, connect it with a friend who is doing that same thing by using technology. For instance, grocery-shop at the same time as your friend while talking to her on your AirPods. While cooking dinner, share your kitchen tricks with your friend on

FaceTime. Connect on Zoom when you're reading a bedtime story to your kids and let your friend's kids listen in. The special sauce behind bundling is that you need not be in the same place, just the same time.

Bundling allows us to include friends in our messy lives. Unlike a happy hour, bundling doesn't sacrifice any of our precious free time—and we don't even need to leave the house. Rather, bundling allows us to leverage our current activities as parents to simultaneously strengthen our friendships. Integrating our friends into the necessary parts of our lives makes us more authentic by showing them what is really happening behind the scenes (rather than the happy front we display in Facebook posts). This kind of intimate self-disclosure and vulnerability is a key ingredient for maintaining close relationships. Bundling can be quick, too. It may take only a weekly call while you clean your living room to make you feel close to a friend who lives in another city.

The great news about bundling is that we now live in a time of abundance in tech solutions to help us share our moments. Many working parents are discovering a plethora of tech products for

connecting online, especially now with so many of us social distancing. As you consider the power of bundling, the following tech options are just the tip of the iceberg:

- Use Zoom or Skype while cooking. Try cooking or baking the same thing as your friend in real time while watching each other's creations unfold.
- Use Marco Polo to create brief video messages in the moment that your friend can view later in the day. Keep it short and real.
- Wear noise-canceling earbuds to talk on the phone (yes, the phone) while doing housework like emptying the dishwasher, doing laundry, or cleaning up.
- Use FaceTime or Duo while grocery shopping. Show off the odd and esoteric items you buy for your kids.
- To simulate the movie theater experience with your family and your friend's family, click "play" on Hulu or Netflix on the phone at the same time, hang up, and then talk about the movie after it's over. If the movie is a comedy, try adding a voice-only connection to your friend's house so that you can hear the reaction to the funny bits; laughter is infectious.
- Use Slack instead of text messaging to keep each other up to date with your goals,

focused, and connected throughout the workday. Create a virtual coffee break with video and your own home brew.

Parents with careers have an enormous challenge in time management, but that challenge can actually be assisted, not worsened, by taking the time to connect with friends. There are many ways to keep in touch with your friends without sacrificing who you are. Encourage your friends to bundle their tasks with you—it may help both of you without adding any extra effort or stress. Any time you intend to do something alone, ask yourself if there's a way you can include a friend. 🤝

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Managing the High-Intensity Workplace

An “always available” culture breeds a variety of dysfunctional behaviors.

→ by ERIN REID and LAKSHMI RAMARAJAN

TALES OF TIME-HUNGRY organizations—from Silicon Valley to Wall Street and from London to Hong Kong—abound. Managers routinely overload their subordinates, contact them outside of business hours, and make last-minute requests for additional work. To satisfy those demands, employees arrive early, stay late, pull all-nighters, work weekends, and remain tied to their electronic devices 24/7. And those who are unable—or unwilling—to respond typically get penalized.

By operating in this way, organizations pressure employees to become what sociologists have called ideal workers: people totally dedicated to their jobs and always on call. The phenomenon is widespread in professional and managerial settings; it’s been documented in

depth at tech start-ups, at investment banks, and in medical organizations. In such places, any suggestion of meaningful outside interests and commitments can signal a lack of fitness for the job.

That’s what Carla Harris feared when she started at Morgan Stanley, where she is now a senior executive. She also happens to be a passionate gospel singer with three CDs and numerous concerts to her credit. But early in her business career, she kept that part of her life private, concerned that being open about the time she devoted to singing would hurt her professionally. Multiple research studies suggest that she had good reason to worry.

To be ideal workers, people must choose, again and again, to prioritize their jobs ahead of other parts of their

lives: their role as parents (actual or anticipated), their personal needs, and even their health. This reality is difficult to talk about, let alone challenge, because despite the well-documented personal and physical costs of these choices, an overwhelming number of people believe that achieving success *requires* them and those around them to conform to this ideal. That commonplace belief sometimes even causes people to resist well-planned organizational changes that could reduce the pressure to be available day and night. When Best Buy, for example, attempted to focus on results and avoid long work hours, some managers balked, holding tightly to the belief that selfless devotion to the job was necessary.

The pressure to be an ideal worker is well established, but how people cope with it—and with what consequences—is too often left unexplored. Is it beneficial to weave ideal-worker expectations into a company culture? Is it necessary, at an individual level, to meet those expectations? Interviews that we have conducted with hundreds of professionals in a variety of fields—including consulting, finance, architecture, entrepreneurship, journalism, and teaching—suggest that being an ideal worker is often neither necessary nor beneficial. A majority of employees—men and women, parents and nonparents—find it difficult to stifle other aspects of themselves and focus single-mindedly on work. They grapple painfully with how to manage other parts of their lives. The solutions they arrive at may allow them to navigate the stresses, but they often suffer serious and dysfunctional consequences.

In the following pages, we describe strategies that people commonly use





to manage the pressure to be 100% available and 100% committed to work, as well as the effects of those strategies on the individuals themselves, on those they supervise, and on the organizations they work for. Finally, we suggest a route to a healthier—and ultimately more productive—organizational culture that can be driven by individual managers' small changes.

Three Strategies

In our research we found that people typically rely on one of three strategies: *accepting* and conforming to the demands of a high-pressure workplace; *passing* as ideal workers by quietly finding ways around the norm; or *revealing* their other commitments and their unwillingness to abandon them.

Accepting. Many people manage the pressure to be fully devoted to work by simply giving in and conforming. Indeed, at one consulting firm among the companies we studied, 43% of the people interviewed fell into this group. In their quest to succeed on the job, “accepters” prioritize their work identities and sacrifice or significantly suppress other meaningful aspects of who they are. People we spoke to across professions told us, somewhat ruefully, of giving up dreams of being civically engaged, running marathons, or getting deeply involved in their family lives. One architect reported:

For me, design is 24/7. This project I'm designing, my boss emails me at all hours of the night—midnight, 6 AM. I can never plan my time, and I'm kind of at his beck and call.

When work is enjoyable and rewarding, an accepting strategy may be beneficial, allowing people to succeed and advance in their careers. But a professional identity that crowds out everything else makes people more vulnerable to career threats, because they have psychologically put all their eggs in one basket. When job loss or other setbacks occur, accepters find it particularly difficult to cope, as other parts of their lives have withered away. For accepters, treating work as the be-all and end-all may be fulfilling when the job is going well, but it leads to fragility in the long term.

Furthermore, people who buy in to the ideal-worker culture find it difficult to understand those who do not. As a result, accepters can become the main drivers of organizational pressure for round-the-clock availability. They tend to have trouble managing people who have lives outside the office. One senior consultant, describing the kind of employee he prefers to work with, said:

I want someone who's lying awake at night thinking, Man, what are we going to do in this meeting tomorrow? Because that's what I do.

Perhaps surprisingly, accepters aren't necessarily good mentors even to people who are trying to conform to the organization's expectations. It can be difficult for junior colleagues to get these individuals' time and attention, in part because accepters are so absorbed in the job. In the words of one consultant, “They can no longer understand how unbelievably stressful it is to come in not knowing how to play the game.” As a result, they often take a sink-or-swim approach to junior-colleague development.

Passing. The strategy employed by another group of workers is to devote time to nonwork activities—but under the organization's radar. At the consulting firm, 27% of the study participants fell into this group. These people were “passing”—a term originally used by sociologist Erving Goffman to describe how people try to hide personal characteristics (such as physical disabilities or race) that might stigmatize them and subject them to discrimination. Consultants who were successful in passing as ideal workers received performance ratings that were just as high as those given to peers who genuinely embraced the 24/7 culture, and colleagues perceived them as being “always on.”

We found that although people across professions developed ways to pass, their strategies for doing so varied. For example, some consultants focused on local industries, which permitted them to develop rosters of clients they could serve with minimal travel time, thus opening up space for other parts of their lives. One consultant explained how he was able to carve out time to sustain his romantic partnership and be an amateur athlete while still appearing to be an ideal worker:

Travel comes out of your personal time, always. That's why I work for [local businesses]. They are all right nearby, and I take a car.

Another consultant also limited himself to working with local clients and often telecommuted to reduce his work hours. He used another key tool as well: controlling information about his whereabouts. He reported (with some pleasure) that he had actually skied

every day the previous week—without claiming any personal time. Yet senior colleagues saw him as a rising star who worked much harder than most people at the firm.

For other passers, the ticket to success was not staying local but exploiting distance. A journalist we interviewed described taking a regional reporting assignment for a prestigious national newspaper, which allowed him to work from home, engage with his family, and file his articles in the evenings after his children went to bed, all while retaining a reputation as an ideal worker. He laughed, saying:

No one ever really knew where I was, because I was hundreds of miles from the home base. I was the only one in my region.

Although passing enables people to survive in demanding cultures without giving their all to work, passers pay a psychological price for hiding parts of themselves from their colleagues, superiors, and subordinates. Human beings have a need to express themselves and to be known by others. When important aspects of their identities cannot be shared at work, people may feel insecure and inauthentic—not to mention disengaged. These feelings have real costs for organizations, too: Our research indicates that over time, passers have a relatively high turnover rate. This suggests that although they may get by in the short term, hiding key dimensions of themselves from their colleagues can be difficult to sustain in the long run.

Passing as an ideal worker can also make it hard to manage others. Passers

don't necessarily want to encourage conformance to the ideal-worker image, but on the other hand, advising subordinates to pass—and effectively engage in subterfuge—is also problematic. So is suggesting open resistance to the demands for round-the-clock availability, because (as we shall see) the careers of people who resist are likely to suffer. To complicate matters further, passers may believe that most people in the organization *want* to work all the time. One senior leader who himself passed but avoided counseling his employees to do likewise made this comment:

I want [my employees] to be happy, but if they derive their happiness from working a lot, that's not for me to judge.

A subtly destructive aspect of passing is that by failing to openly challenge the ideal-worker culture, passers allow that culture to persist. Their track records prove that people don't need to be workaholics to succeed—but the organization continues to design and measure work as if that were the case.

Revealing. Not everyone wants to pass—or can—and some who initially pass grow frustrated with this strategy over time. These people cope by openly sharing other parts of their lives and by asking for changes to the structure of their work, such as reduced schedules and other formal accommodations. At the consulting firm, 30% of those interviewed pursued this strategy. Although it's often assumed that people who resist the pressure to be ideal workers are primarily women with families, we have not encountered enormous gender differences in our research. Data from the consulting firm shows that fewer than half of the women were “revealers,” while more than a quarter of the men were.

Revealing allows people the validation of being more fully known by colleagues, which is denied to the passers. However, it can have damaging career



Idea in Brief

THE CONTEXT

The expectation that people will be totally available and committed to work has never been stronger—but even in high-intensity environments, most people don't conform to that ideal.

THE PROBLEM

The strategies employees use to cope with unrealistic expectations often prove damaging to them and to the organizations they work for.

THE SOLUTION

It's time to redefine the “ideal” worker. People will be more engaged and productive—and organizations more successful—if individuals aren't pressured to suppress their complicated, multilayered identities.

consequences. At the consulting firm, performance reviews and promotion data showed that revealers paid a substantial penalty. For example, one consultant indicated his unwillingness to make work his top priority when he asked for paternity leave. With his wife eight months pregnant, the soon-to-be father expected a temporary reprieve. Instead, he faced questions about his dedication:

One of the partners said to me, “You have a choice to make. Are you going to be a professional, or are you going to be just an average person in your field? If you are going to be a professional, then nothing else can be as important to you as your work. If you want to be world-class, it's got to be all-consuming.”

Surviving a High-Intensity Workplace

There's no perfect strategy for managing oneself in an organization that values selfless dedication, but it's useful to know your own tendencies, understand their risks, and mitigate those risks to the extent possible. To get started, think about this question:

How do you tend to respond to texts and emails from colleagues in the evenings?

RESPONSE	STRATEGY	MOTIVATION	RISKS TO BE AWARE OF	WHAT YOU CAN ALTER
<p>Rapid engagement You always reply and, if requested, bang out some work (e.g., "I'll have it for you in five minutes!"). You rarely make evening plans.</p>	Accepting	You devote yourself completely to work because it is expected and rewarded.	<p>You may burn out or be slow to rebound from setbacks.</p> <p>You may have trouble mentoring others and creating a pipeline of promotable employees.</p>	<p>Set aside blocks of time for other aspects of your life.</p> <p>Don't expect subordinates to make work their highest priority.</p> <p>Be open to different ways of working.</p>
<p>Feigned attentiveness You respond and give the impression that you are working (e.g., "Am on it—will take a few hours"). You tend to make and keep evening plans but rarely mention them.</p>	Passing	You seek to protect your career while sustaining other aspects of your life.	<p>You may not build close relationships at work.</p> <p>You may perpetuate the ideal-worker myth.</p>	<p>Come out to selected colleagues so you feel better known and they don't feel compelled to sacrifice their personal lives.</p> <p>Make it clear that outside activities don't hurt your performance.</p>
<p>Next-day follow-up Unless it's urgent, you don't alter your plans (e.g., "At a show—will get to this tomorrow"). You may not even respond that evening.</p>	Revealing	You wish to be open in your relationships and believe the organization may need to change.	<p>You may damage your career.</p> <p>You may sacrifice the credibility needed to push for change.</p>	<p>Emphasize results, not effort, when discussing work.</p> <p>Encourage others to be open about their behavior and thus change workplace norms.</p>

Over time, being sanctioned for failure to conform can lead to resentment. Instead of motivating people to devote themselves first and foremost to their work, it may cause them to leave the organization in search of a better fit.

The experience of revealing their nonwork commitments and being penalized for doing so can make it difficult for people to manage others. Like passers, revealers may struggle with encouraging their subordinates to accept ideal-worker pressures, but they may shy away from advising resistance because they know the costs firsthand.

There Has to Be a Better Way

Our research suggests that if employees felt free to draw some lines between their professional and personal lives, organizations would benefit from greater engagement, more-open relationships, and more paths to success. We outline three steps that managers can take to create a richer definition of what it means to be an "ideal" worker—without sacrificing high performance. These changes don't have to be pushed by a senior leader within the organization; they can be effectively implemented at the team level.

Develop your own multifaceted identity. People in leadership positions can avoid the fragility that results from blind acceptance of ideal-worker norms by deliberately cultivating their own nonwork identities: a civic self, an athletic self, a family-oriented self. One architect told us that when he defined himself solely in terms of his work, professional struggles and setbacks made him miserable. Ironically, as he broadened his focus, he found more professional fulfillment. As managers become more resilient, they may also learn that employees whose lives are



better balanced create value for the organization.

Managers can start to change organizational norms by pointing out the positive things that employees' outside activities bring to the workplace. One consultant whose firm had recently merged with another enterprise observed that none of his new colleagues ever stayed in the office past 5:30 PM. When he asked about this pattern, he was told:

We don't want our folks to spend every waking minute at work; we want them to be well-rounded individuals, to be curious, to see things out in the world, and to have all kinds of different experiences that they can then bring to bear on their work.

People who pursue outside activities—volunteering in local politics, for example, or at a child's school—are exposed to experiences, specialized knowledge, and networks that would be unavailable to them if they had spent that time holed up at the office.

Minimize time-based rewards.

Employees who choose a passing strategy do so in part because it's common to evaluate *how much* people work (or seem to), rather than the quality of their output. This tendency is often reinforced by subtle and not-so-subtle beliefs and practices. For example, a senior consultant expressed his conviction that successful consultants must have the “high-five factor”: They've spent so much time on-site with the client that when they enter the client's building, employees give them high fives. One firm we worked with awarded a prize to the person who had taken the most flights in a year. Valuing

work time over work product—which motivates people to deceive others about how many hours they're clocking—is an easy trap to fall into, especially for professionals, whose knowledge-based work is difficult to evaluate.

We propose that managers reduce the incentives for passing (and the costs of revealing) by encouraging people to focus on achieving their goals and measuring actual results rather than hours invested. For example, instead of celebrating a high-five factor based on time spent with the client, managers could praise employees for the quality of the advice provided or the number of repeat engagements secured. Managers can also move away from time-based rewards by working to set reasonable expectations with clients.


Other policy changes can be made even more easily. One employee we interviewed remarked that her current boss differed from her old one because he believed late nights were a sign that she was working inefficiently, and he discouraged them. Another employee stated that her manager simply asked her to set her own deadlines—realistically. When given such autonomy, high-performing workers who would otherwise pass or reveal are likely to follow through on their commitments.

Protect employees' personal lives.

Most organizations leave it to their employees to set boundaries between their work and their nonwork lives—often with the best intentions. When Netflix offered unlimited time off, for example, managers thought they were treating their people like “grown-ups.” But providing complete freedom can heighten employees' fears that their choices will signal a lack of commitment. Without

clear direction, many employees simply default to the ideal-worker expectation, suppressing the need to live more-balanced lives.

Managers have the power to change this by flipping the script and actively protecting employees' nonwork time and identities. They can, for example, institute required vacations, regular leaves, and reasonable work hours—for all employees, not just some. Making a firm commitment to avoid excessive workloads and extreme and unpredictable hours, rather than simply giving people the option to request downtime, will help them engage with other parts of their selves.

THE PRESSURE TO BE an ideal worker is at an all-time high, but so are the costs to both individuals and their employers. Moreover, the experiences of those who are able to pass as ideal workers suggest that superhuman dedication may not always be necessary for organizational success. By valuing all aspects of people's identities, rewarding work output instead of work time, and taking steps to protect employees' personal lives, leaders can begin to unravel the ideal-worker myth that has become woven into the fabric of their organizations. And that will enhance employees' resilience, their creativity, and their satisfaction on the job. 

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Manage Your Team's Collective Time

Time management is a group endeavor.
The payoff goes far beyond morale and retention.

→ by LESLIE PERLOW

MOST PROFESSIONALS APPROACH time management the wrong way. People who fall behind at work are seen to be personally failing—just as people who give up on diet or exercise plans are seen to be lacking self-control or discipline. In response, countless time management experts focus on individual habits, much as self-help coaches do. They offer advice about such things as keeping better to-do lists, not checking email incessantly, and not procrastinating. Of course, we could all do a better job managing our time. But in the modern workplace, with its emphasis on connectivity and collaboration, the real problem is not how individuals manage their own time. It's how we manage our collective time—how we work together to get the job done. Here is where the true opportunity for productivity gains lies.

Nearly a decade ago I began working with a team at the Boston Consulting Group to implement what may sound like a modest innovation: persuading each member to designate and spend one weeknight out of the office and completely unplugged from work. The intervention was aimed at improving quality of life in an industry that's notorious for long hours and a 24/7 culture. The early returns were positive; the initiative was expanded to four teams of consultants, and then to 10. The results, which I described in a 2009 HBR article, "Making Time Off Predictable—and Required," and in a 2012 book, *Sleeping with Your Smartphone*, were profound. Consultants on teams with mandatory time off had higher job satisfaction and a better work/life balance, and they felt they were learning more on the job. It's no surprise, then, that BCG has continued to

The Proof Is in the Productivity

More companies are using structured-time-off programs to change how teams work, and they are realizing significant gains. Some examples:

The Boston Consulting Group

THE PROGRAM

Predictability, Teaming, and Open Communication

THE RESULTS

Participants were **55%** likelier than others to report that their team does everything it can to be efficient and **74%** likelier than others to intend to stay at BCG for the long term.

A pharmaceutical company

THE PROGRAM

Enhanced Productivity Days

THE RESULTS

Participants were **35%** likelier than before to report that their team tries to eliminate unnecessary work and **55%** likelier than before to report satisfaction with work/life balance.

A retailer

THE PROGRAM

Control of Our Lives

THE RESULTS

Participants were **38%** faster than before at compiling end-of-the-month financial reports and **25%** more engaged than before.

A technical team

THE PROGRAM

Predictable Work Days

THE RESULTS

Participants were **62%** likelier than before to report that their team does everything it can to be effective and **31%** likelier than before to report that their teammates help them with their work.

assigned the work. Another, in Bangalore, was self-managed and specialized, and it assigned work according to technical expertise. The third, in Budapest, had the strongest sense of being a team; its members were the most versatile and interchangeable.

Although, as noted, the end products were the same, the teams' varying approaches yielded different results. For example, the hub-and-spokes team worked fewer hours than the others, while the most versatile team had much greater flexibility and control over its schedule. The teams were completely unaware that their counterparts elsewhere in the world were managing their work differently. My research provided a vivid reminder that every task can be approached in a variety of ways and that any given team can often find far more efficient ways to get things done. This is the real power of team time management: Teams develop the ability to continually improve the way they coordinate their work, and frequently that yields new efficiencies.

The time-based interventions I use to catalyze team time management address three distinct (though sometimes overlapping) problems that frequently arise:

- Some employees yearn for more control over their work time—the result of work that stretches across time zones, a 24/7 culture that evolved to meet rigid deadlines or demanding client expectations, or the always-on mentality that stems partly from technology enabling people to connect to work at any time. The structured-time-off goal in this case involves increasing predictability—typically, creating a time when workers know that

expand the program: As of this spring, it has been implemented on thousands of teams in 77 offices in 40 countries.

During the five years since I first reported on this work, I have introduced similar time-based interventions at a range of companies—and I have come to appreciate the true power of those interventions. They put the ownership of how a team works into the hands of team members, who are empowered and incentivized to optimize their collective time. As a result, teams collaborate better. They streamline their work. They meet deadlines. They are more productive and efficient. Teams that set a goal of structured time off—and, crucially, meet regularly to discuss how they'll work together to ensure that every member takes it—have more open dialogue, engage in more experimen-

tation and innovation, and ultimately function better.

Creating “Enhanced Productivity” Days

One of the insights driving this work is the realization that many teams stick to tried-and-true processes that, although familiar, are often inefficient. Even companies that create innovative products rarely innovate when it comes to process. This realization came to the fore when I studied three teams of software engineers working for the same company in different cultural contexts. The teams had the same assignments and produced the same amount of work, but they used very different methods. One, in Shenzhen, had a hub-and-spokes org chart—a project manager maintained control and



they will be off the clock or establishing more-consistent workday hours.

- Teams that regularly work very long hours or that do so during peak periods often are not recognized for their extra efforts, and high turnover can result. These teams' members tend to greatly value some extra time off in return for their hard work. In this case, the structured-time-off goal is to designate periods of time off during the normal workweek.

- Some teams are plagued by interruptions—the nonstop distractions common in a cubicle culture with constant emailing, an excess of meetings, and so on. These teams' members crave focused time in order to eliminate the stress of unfinished tasks or the need to take work home. The structured-time-off goal in this case is quiet, uninterrupted time, including meeting-free time.

Consider the situation at a midsize global pharmaceutical company I studied. Employees there generally kept predictable 9-to-5 or 9-to-6 hours at the office, but they were highly stressed. Many complained of an inability to get their jobs done at the office, which led them to take work home at night or on the weekend.

When I investigated, I found that the company was inundated with meetings. An overly collaborative culture in the division I was studying meant that too many employees were involved in every decision. Meetings were crowded with unnecessary people; employees were double booked; everyone's Outlook calendar was packed. The only time people could do their actual work was outside normal office hours.

The team I was studying at this organization rallied around a time-off goal

of one meeting-free day a week, during which members worked from home. Conference calls and other virtual meetings were also banned during the designated day. These changes eliminated office interruptions and impromptu discussions and also saved commuting time. Team members called it their Enhanced Productivity Day, or EPD.


The program worked exceptionally well, not only because team members could use their EPD to get their real work done but also because it served as a forcing mechanism. To free up members' schedules, the team had to completely rethink its need for meetings, along with their duration, required attendance, and agendas. As a result, meetings became smaller, shorter, more focused, and less frequent. Here's how one employee described the change: "This initiative is not just about meetings or working from home—though I am usually more productive at home than I am in the office. It's a change of thinking—it's thinking about how we as a team operate." As the program spread to other teams, managers reported that the schedule change and meeting rethinks helped employees become more focused and do higher-quality work.

Building a Grassroots Movement

At a major international retail company I studied, an accounting team based in the United States typically worked very long hours at the end of each month to meet financial-reporting deadlines. Concerned about morale, the manager wanted to find a way to alleviate the pressure. The result was a program called Control of

Our Lives, or COOL, which allowed workers to schedule one afternoon away from work during every two-week period.

Since the program began, employee engagement scores have risen sharply. Just as important, the team has cut the time spent compiling end-of-the-month reports from four days to two and a half days. "My team is now more productive, engaged, and collaborative than ever," the team manager says—and he reports that other managers have noticed the change. He explains, "A grassroots movement has created the buzz needed to get leadership buy-in to expand the program." Other teams in the U.S. as well as teams in Brazil and India have become enthusiastic about establishing COOL afternoons.

To help workers manage their time, we should stop telling individuals to change themselves and start empowering them to act together to change the way they work. Small steps can make a big difference. By rallying around a modest time-off goal, teams can develop a new capability: managing their time as a team. As a result, people can better manage their lives outside work while simultaneously accomplishing more at work. To put it another way, team time management can mitigate the problem of overworked and overstressed employees while making the organization better at doing its core work. For managers, that's a big win-win. 

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MANAGING OTHERS

Quick Takes



1. The Pandemic Has Exposed the Fallacy of the “Ideal Worker”

→ by JOAN C. WILLIAMS

WITH MOST OF US working from home these days, Americans’ workday has increased by 40%—roughly three hours a day—the largest increase in the world. This busyness and productivity comes at a huge price. Many employees are now doing the

work of three or more people. They’re doing their own jobs, their childcare worker’s job, and their children’s teachers’ jobs. Yet, many employers seem oblivious. I hear reports of companies cheerfully assuring their employees, and themselves, that everyone is

working at, or close to, 100%. Why don’t more managers see the problem here?

It’s because there’s still a widespread reverence for the “ideal worker.” We commonly define the ideal worker as someone who starts working in early adulthood and

continues, full-time and full force, for 40 years straight. The concept reflects a breadwinner-homemaker model that dates back to the Industrial Revolution and functioned fairly well through the 1960s, until women began entering the formal workforce in greater numbers. But the ideal-worker norm has long exacted a higher toll from women, who not only do their day jobs but are also expected to deal with family and household responsibilities.

However, not only women suffer under the burden of the ideal-worker norm. According to a recent survey, 14% of women are considering quitting their jobs due to work-family conflict related to Covid-19. Perhaps more surprising, so are 11% of men. My organization runs a hotline for workers who encounter discrimination based on family care responsibilities, and we hear all the time from men whose organizations have outdated leave policies that give the “primary caregiver” months off but far less time off to the “secondary caregiver.” We’re all seeing how the pandemic can serve to level the playing field as some men take on more domestic responsibilities than they used to. This is not to deny that women are

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If there was ever a time to put to rest the old-fashioned notion of the ideal worker, it's now.

doing more, but often neither men nor women are the ideal workers of times past. Today, a key divide is between parents and nonparents. “I’ve noticed that there is a huge split among my trial-lawyer colleagues. Those without children are, for the most part, getting a lot done. Those of us with kids at home are litigating as if sinking in quicksand,” says Gordon Knapp, a lawyer in San Francisco.

To be sure, the ideal of an employee whose family responsibilities are kept tastefully out of sight is eroding. Before Covid-19, many people quietly skulked off to attend their child’s school play or coach a soccer game, nursed their babies in cars parked outside factories, or slid away unobtrusively to take their elderly parent to the doctor. Now there’s a lot less of a taboo because you can’t hide it. In fact, that taboo has now shifted: Men who are old-fashioned enough to be embarrassed when their kids walk in, like the BBC dad, are now ridiculed (perhaps unfairly if he was merely reflecting others’ expectations of him). Covid-19 has made visible the conflict between an older generation of ideal workers and younger men who believe that a good father is involved in his children’s daily care.

An in-house lawyer at a large company told me: “It has really humanized our leaders, because they are all sending messages about how they are coping with their kids, dogs, and 72-year-old mother, trying to make it clear that we are all in this together.”

If there was ever a time to put to rest the old-fashioned notion of the ideal worker, it’s now. Postpandemic, let’s resculpt workplace ideals so that they reflect people’s lives today—not half a century ago. If you are focused on employee engagement, this is the path forward. (If you aren’t, you should be: A recent study found that disengaged employees cost employers 34% of their annual salary.)

The first step is to institutionalize telework. I and other advocates have long known that the main barrier to widespread adoption was a failure of imagination. That’s over. Under Covid-19, many jobs that were supposedly impossible to do remotely went remote with little transition time and modest outlays. Three things happened to make the unthinkable doable: (1) Companies invested the time and money necessary for seamless remote access. (2) Older employees who were not as tech-adept invested the time

to figure it all out. And (3) supervisors figured out how to supervise people without physically breathing down their necks. The unthinkable has become not just thinkable but mundane.

But long-term telecommuting is different from the crisis-related working from home that’s now widespread. Telework requires having childcare during work hours and a setup that allows for undistracted attention to work. For hourly workers in states like California, telework also requires employers to ensure statutorily mandated worker protections like meal and rest breaks. Most employers will also want to set limits on overtime.

At a deeper level, companies need to analyze the optimal role of remote work going forward. Lots of research shows that telecommuting typically makes workers more productive—not surprising given the amount of sports chatter around the water-cooler. Remote work also makes people more engaged and satisfied and less likely to quit. They also often work longer hours since they don’t have to commute—the average commute for Americans is 54 minutes a day.

Don’t assume that telework is an all-or-nothing proposition. For many jobs and

companies, the challenge will be to find the right balance of telework and on-site work. Many knowledge workers need spurts of unstructured interaction, followed by hours of quiet time to execute—time that’s often more productive done away from the office. Finding the optimal combination of telework and on-site work will vary from company to company, job to job, and person to person.

As a smart person once said, never let a good crisis go to waste. Let’s not waste this one. Instead, let’s work together to ensure that a silver lining of this vast and frightening pandemic is a new definition of the worker as someone who’s ambitious, focused, and committed—but who must also balance work obligations with caregiving responsibilities. When 30 million kids are out of school, employers can’t just ignore that.

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2. Why the Crisis Is Putting Companies at Risk of Losing Female Talent

→ by COLLEEN AMMERMAN AND BORIS GROYSBERG

THE COVID-19 CRISIS has reconfigured how we work, parent, and care for ourselves and our communities. It remains uncertain how a postpandemic society will function, but already a consensus is emerging that the global pivot to working remotely will likely change how many companies think about face time and rigid work schedules.

Might the current revolution in how work gets done benefit women, who traditionally have been more likely to take advantage of flexible work arrangements? A recent paper by a group of economic experts argues that yes, the current situation will normalize remote and flexible work, making these arrangements available to a broader segment of working women.

While we share the authors' hope, we aren't convinced that the sudden expansion of remote work will end up benefiting women.

As we've watched the coronavirus crisis unfold, we see many of the barriers that stymie women's careers and lead companies to underutilize and lose their female talent (many of which we explore in our forth-

coming book, *Glass Half Broken: Shattering the Barriers That Still Hold Women Back at Work*) become magnified.

We believe that many leaders may emerge from the crisis with a long-term talent problem if they don't incorporate some small but critical steps into their current practices. By addressing four key biases and barriers, you can prevent the careers of your women employees from becoming collateral damage during this crisis and set your company up to leverage their capabilities today and in the future.

We aren't suggesting that you shift focus from mission-critical activities: Cash flow, employee safety, and negotiations with lenders and clients are rightly your priorities. And we acknowledge that many leaders in essential industries are grappling with a different set of management challenges as they try to run operations that can't be done from home. But for those who are managing employees who have transitioned to working from home, you can take straightforward steps to win the loyalty of your women employees and keep your company from losing hard-won ground on gender inclusion.

Leaders can foster an environment where questioning women's competence on the basis of their caregiving roles is not accepted.

Pay Extra Mind to the Motherhood Penalty

Parents are now managing round-the-clock childcare while trying to meet deadlines, keep connected to colleagues, and demonstrate their value. This has intensified the already-outsize burden shouldered by working mothers, as numerous personal accounts and analyses have outlined. Being seen in a caregiving role tends to boost men's reputations and elicit warmth from others, but when women's caregiving is visible, it triggers doubts about women's capabilities. Women with children are viewed as less competent and less committed than men, including fathers, as well as women without children.

In a typical workplace, women can and do deploy a variety of strategies to circumvent this bias. Over the years, numerous women have told us about not displaying family photos at the office or minimizing the information they share about their caregiving responsibilities. Setting aside questions about whether women with children should have to take such steps to safeguard their credibility (they shouldn't) or the extent to which they can (many, particularly lower

earners with fewer childcare options, can't), it remains that when women step through the office door, they have some modicum of control over how to navigate this bias.

Now that home is the office, even these provisional strategies are no longer available. Children can burst into a room during an important meeting, audibly and/or visually triggering the bias. A call might have to be ended abruptly because a child needs attention. It may not be possible to find a space free of reminders of parental status—children's toys or artwork in the background or interruptions from a spouse about a homeschooling issue.

Meanwhile, fathers may actually benefit when colleagues see evidence of their children (or the children themselves). There is a well-documented "fatherhood premium" when it comes to men's earning power, as well as widespread acknowledgment that fathers tend to be more highly praised than mothers for caring for their children.

With your employees' family status and family life now highly visible, it's critical to be aware of these divergent biases toward fathers and mothers. As a leader, you can foster an

environment where questioning women's competence on the basis of their caregiving roles is not accepted. And leaders who themselves have children at home—whether they are a man or a woman—can be vocal and transparent about juggling their responsibilities and the importance of their family role. Now is not the time to encourage the ideal-worker norm—not only will you look out of touch and callous for expecting employees to put work first at this time, you will entrench the gender biases that cast women as inherently less competent and valuable.

Pare Down the Pressure

We're all learning—sometimes to our pleasant surprise—just how much work can be done from home. This isn't surprising to those who've researched virtual work. They've long known that people who work remotely are actually more productive than average. But it's important to remember that none of the research conducted on virtual work was conducted during a time like this, and it doesn't follow that the productivity gains are available under current conditions.

During a period of such uncertainty and strain, it's tempting to lean on your people to crank out as much work as possible, especially if you're projecting revenue shortfalls and negotiating with creditors. But not only is this approach likely to alienate your employees regardless of their gender or family situation, it is guaranteed to mean you undervalue and underrecognize women with children at home.

Before the pandemic, women's careers were already vulnerable. Men in top management jobs are far more likely to have the support of a spouse who doesn't work, as we've seen in our own research on Harvard Business School alumni and with a global sample of executives. And in dual-career families, women's careers tend to take a backseat to their male partners', as we've observed in our own research as well as that of others. When push comes to shove, women step back from work—and what bigger shove could there be than the sudden and total disappearance of childcare options? Contrary to conventional wisdom, women's preference to ratchet back their careers is not the primary driver of highly educated women's decisions to quit their careers.

Companies are on the brink of pushing out waves of women if they don't acknowledge and accommodate the challenges faced by working parents.

Rather, they are pushed out by workplaces that devalue their contributions and dismiss their needs.

Companies are on the brink of pushing out waves of women if they don't acknowledge and accommodate the challenges faced by working parents. Doing so will benefit parents of all genders in your organization but is especially critical for women with young children.

Instead of relying on a level of time and effort that your employees are simply unable to give, you need to be ruthless about priorities and business needs. Identify what really matters, and ask people to devote their best effort, whatever that means. By setting reasonable expectations about the amount of time employees should spend on work, you'll get exponentially greater engagement.

Run Virtual Meetings Equitably

Right now, our computer screens *are* our workplaces, and women face the same patterns of exclusion they did in the office. Make sure that women have a seat at the virtual table. With pressure to make decisions as efficiently as possible, taking the time to ask whose voice

needs to be heard might feel like a luxury. Your impulse might be to huddle with smaller groups, but this instinct will not serve you well. You're likely to find yourself looking at a gallery of faces very similar to your own—those you feel most comfortable with. We've heard from women who have found themselves unexpectedly left out of important calls and who don't feel valued and now see their future at the company quite differently. Take the extra time to think about whether you are including everyone who should have input, and direct your reports who manage others to do the same.

It's well known that women's ideas are more likely to go unrecognized in meetings, and in a virtual setting it's even easier to glide over their contributions if no one is mindful of acknowledging them. As meetings get leaner, facilitators need to keep track of who participates and solicit input from those who've spoken less. And we all know that it can be alarmingly easy to lose focus during a video call and miss what someone says. Again, pay careful attention to these moments. Who was asked to repeat themselves, and whose garbled remark was simply ignored?

Keep Digital Spaces Inclusive

Research has shown that men's networks benefit from tighter, more-personal ties with work colleagues, whereas women's relationships with coworkers tend to be less close and more transactional. The virtual social environment is going to exacerbate this disparity, with women possibly looped in only or primarily to formal, official channels of information.

In fact, virtual meetings open up a fresh new avenue of exclusion: the invisible side conversation. Managers can easily have chats in a different window right alongside the actual meeting, perhaps even coming up with plans that undermine group decisions or making inappropriate remarks about colleagues. Even if not actively discriminatory, these invisible conversations cement relationships and are impossible to break into. A woman tired of being left out of informal but important chats can't invite herself to the next discussion or ask a trusted colleague to clue her in if she doesn't even know they're happening. While you may not be able to completely prevent this kind of behavior, you can make it known that you expect better from your team. Before meetings, remind people that they

should be sharing their views with the full group and not carrying on side conversations that exclude others. And if you get wind of problematic comments and conversations, make it clear that these exchanges are unacceptable and merit serious consequences.

Other kinds of virtual interactions can also create barriers. Now that all our socializing is done online, coworkers might gather in special Slack channels, FaceTime happy hours, and other digital spaces. And excluding women from these virtual events, intentionally or not, is frictionless. There's no risk of being overheard talking about an outing and, on the other side, no awkward realization that you've been left out. These types of private digital gatherings can widen the gulf between men's and women's workplace networks.

While you can't dictate what employees do with their online downtime, you can encourage your employees to be mindful about inclusion when it comes to team-building and social events. You can also model an inclusive approach by making sure you aren't spending more time informally chatting with certain people. And remind managers that their responsibility to foster an inclusive culture still stands.



A postpandemic world will have winners and losers when it comes to female talent, and it's not by chance which team you'll find yourself on. Right now, of course, employees' basic well-being and safety is the paramount concern, but don't let gender inclusion fall to the wayside. You run the real risk of a female talent drain, losing capable workers and leaders you need to make it through the present moment and to create future success. Instead of standing by as women's careers become casualties of the crisis, you can cement your women employees' commitment and maximize their contributions. Not only will you be helping maintain our collective progress toward gender equality, you'll be setting your business up to leverage its benefits in a future that will surely need it.

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JEKATERINA NIKITINA/GETTY IMAGES



3. Your Late-Night Emails Are Hurting Your Team

→ by MAURA THOMAS

AROUND 11 PM one night, you realize there's a key step your team needs to take on a current project. So, you dash off an email to the team members while you're thinking about it. No time like the present, right?

Wrong. As a productivity trainer specializing in attention management, I've seen over the past decade how after-hours emails speed up corporate cultures—and

that, in turn, chips away at creativity, innovation, and true productivity.

If this is a common behavior for you, you're missing the opportunity to get some distance from work, which is critical to the fresh perspective you need as the leader. And, when the boss is working, the team feels like they should be working.

Think about the message you'd *like* to send. Do you

intend for your staff to reply to you immediately? Or are you just sending the email because you're thinking about it at the moment and want to get it done before you forget? If it's the former, you're *intentionally* chaining your employees to the office 24/7. If it's the latter, you're *unintentionally* chaining your employees to the office 24/7. And this isn't good for you, your employees, or your company

Being connected in off-hours during busy times is the sign of a high performer. Never disconnecting is the sign of a workaholic.

culture. Being connected in off-hours during busy times is the sign of a high performer. Never disconnecting is the sign of a workaholic. And there is a difference.

Regardless of your intent, I've found through my experience with hundreds of companies that there are two reasons late-night email habits spread from the boss to her team:

1. Ambition. If the boss is emailing late at night or on weekends, most employees think a late-night response is required—or that they'll impress you if they respond immediately. Even if just a couple of your employees share this belief, it could spread through your whole team. A casual mention in a meeting, "When we were emailing last night..." is all it takes. After all, everyone is looking for an edge in their career.

2. Attention. Lots of people have no intention of "working" when they aren't at work. But they have poor attention-management skills. They're so accustomed to multitasking and to constant distractions that regardless of what else they're doing, they find their fingers mindlessly tapping the icons on their smartphones that connect

them to their emails, texts, and social media. Your late-night communication feeds that bad habit.

Being "always on" hurts results. When employees are constantly monitoring their email after work hours—whether because they fear missing something from you or they are addicted to their devices—they are missing out on essential downtime that brains need. Experiments have shown that to deliver our best at work, we require downtime. Time away produces new ideas and fresh insights. But your employees can never disconnect when they're always reaching for their devices to see if you've emailed. Creativity, inspiration, and motivation are your competitive advantage, but they are also depletable resources that need to be recharged. Incidentally, this is also true for you, so it's worthwhile to examine your own communication habits.

Company leaders can help unhealthy assumptions about email and other communication from taking root.

Be clear about expectations for email and other communications, and set up policies to support a healthy culture that recognizes and values single-tasking, focus, and downtime. Vynamic, a successful health care consul-

tancy in Philadelphia, created a policy it calls "zmail," where email is discouraged between 10 PM and 7 AM during the week, and all day on weekends. The policy doesn't prevent work during these times, nor does it prohibit communication. If an after-hours message seems necessary, the staff is compelled to assess whether it's important enough to require a phone call. If employees choose to work during off-hours, zmail discourages them from putting their habits onto others by sending emails during this time; instead they can save the messages as drafts to be manually sent later or program their email client to automatically send the messages during work hours. This policy creates alignment between the stated belief that downtime is important and the behaviors of the staff that contribute to the culture.

Also, take a hard look at the attitudes of leaders regarding an always-on work environment. The (often unconscious) belief that more work equals more success is difficult to overcome, but the truth is that this is neither beneficial nor sustainable. Long work hours actually *decrease* both productivity and engagement. I've seen that often leaders believe theoretically in downtime, but they

also want to keep company objectives moving forward—which *seems* like it requires constant communication.

A frantic environment that includes answering emails at all hours doesn't make your staff more productive. It just makes them busy and distracted. You base your staff hiring decisions on their knowledge, experience, and unique talents, not on how many tasks they can seemingly do at once or how many emails they can answer in a day.

So, demonstrate and encourage an environment where employees can actually apply that brain power in a meaningful way:

- Ditch the phrase "time management" for the more relevant "attention management," and make training on this crucial skill part of your staff development plan.
 - Refrain from after-hours communication.
 - Model and discuss the benefits of presence by putting away your device when speaking with your staff and implementing a no-device policy in meetings to promote single-tasking and full engagement.
 - Discourage an always-on environment of distraction that inhibits creative flow by emphasizing the importance of focus, balancing an open
-



floor plan with plenty of quiet spaces, and creating part-time remote work options for high-concentration roles, tasks, and projects.

These behaviors will contribute to a higher-quality output from yourself and your staff, and a more productive corporate culture.

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4. Help Your Overwhelmed, Stressed-Out Team

→ by JULIE MOSOW

IS YOUR TEAM stressed-out? These days, everyone seems overwhelmed and way too busy. But even when your team members have a lot on their plates, they don't have to sacrifice their health or happiness. What can you do to reduce your team's stress? How can you help them focus on what really needs to get done?

What the Experts Say

As a leader, it's your job to help your people find balance. Of course, you need results, but you also want a team that's not at constant risk of being burned-out. Research shows that memory, attention, and concentration suffer when people try to manage the constant stream

of communication and distraction that's a regular part of the workplace. Julie Morgenstern, productivity expert and author of *Never Check E-Mail in the Morning: And Other Strategies for Making Your Work Life Work* (Fireside, 2004), sees this every day: "Almost everyone struggles to focus at work," she says. "We want to think,



write, and strategize, but because these functions require deep thinking and uninterrupted time, we stay busy with the tasks, meetings, and messages that pop up all day long rather than tackling really important projects.” Liane Davey, vice president of team solutions at Knightsbridge Human Capital and author of *You First: Inspire Your Team to Grow Up, Get Along, and Get Stuff Done* (Wiley, 2013), agrees, noting that an overly busy office can kill morale and leave employees disengaged and less capable of getting everything done. It’s on you, the manager, to help your people cut through the chaos, reduce stress, and make sure your team can accomplish its most important work.

Focus your team on the things that matter. The first step, says Davey, is to identify the unique contribution your team makes to the organization. Begin by asking, “What does the company expect from my team that no other group can accomplish?” Don’t answer this alone in your office. Involve your team. Once you all agree on your team’s purpose, it becomes the guiding principle for how everyone should spend their time and the litmus test for what work team members

should take on and what they should let go.

Edit their workload.

Evaluate each project on the basis of whether or not it’s in what Davey calls “the sweet spot”—what you’ve previously identified as your group’s unique purpose, what they’re good at, and what’s important to the larger goals of the organization. “It’s the manager’s responsibility to develop an action plan that allows everyone to be more productive and to insulate their teams from low-priority work that may trickle down from senior management,” she says. When a new assignment comes your way, don’t automatically say yes. “Remember to consider each project with an eye to whether or not it takes advantage of what your team, and only your team, has to offer,” Morgenstern says.

Schedule uninterrupted work.

“When you get distracted by something at work,” says Morgenstern, “it takes at least 20 minutes to refocus on the task at hand.” Encourage your team to set aside an hour or more (Morgenstern’s team gives it three hours) each morning for quiet, proactive work. “Be sure everyone understands that there are to be no inter-

ruptions unless it’s an emergency,” she recommends. By making it a group goal, you increase your collective focus and prevent backsliding. Also check that your team members know how to break larger projects up into smaller tasks that can be accomplished in the amount of time you’ve set aside for strategic work each day. “Once they use this time effectively,” she says, “their productivity will improve.”

Fix your meetings. “Meetings can be a huge waste of time,” says Davey. To avoid that problem, “every meeting should include standing agenda items to allow for productive discussions and decision making about the team’s core assignments,” she says. Morgenstern suggests that managers establish no more than three objectives, decide who needs to be there, set limits on the duration of meetings, and use the last 15 minutes to clarify how the participants will move forward. Above all, make sure a meeting is really necessary. “Sometimes an email or memo can accomplish the same goal in a much shorter amount of time,” she suggests.

Set limits on email.

Technology has created an always-on culture, where

work bleeds into evenings and weekends. But that can be counterproductive if your people never feel they have a break. Morgenstern suggests setting boundaries on the workday and limiting after-hours emails to urgent issues. “So many people are addicted to their phones, but over time, most people realize that there’s very little that can’t wait and that it’s far more important to connect to what’s meaningful to us both personally and professionally,” she says. The brain is actually wired for rest, adds Davey. “Without taking time to recharge, we create unsustainable levels of stress and anxiety.”

Lead by example. When setting new norms for your team, you need to walk the talk yourself. “The movement against busy starts at the top,” Davey says, pointing to the way Jeff Weiner of LinkedIn schedules time for what he calls “nothing.” Talk to your team about what you’re doing and why, Morgenstern recommends, and if one of your strategies isn’t working, admit it, try something different, and move on. Show that you’re committed to making a change both individually and as a group. “It takes a while to break these habits,” she says, “but once you all get used to

An overly busy office can kill morale and leave employees disengaged.

a deeper sense of accomplishment, you'll never go back.”

Principles to Remember

Do:

- Agree on what's unique about your group's skills and experience
- Reduce or eliminate assignments that don't align with your team's purpose
- Schedule time for high-level, strategic work

Don't:

- Email your employees at all hours—set limits on technology use
- Call meetings without an explicit purpose—stick to an agenda
- Underestimate the importance of your own behavior—you set the norms on your team

CASE STUDY 1

Set a Good Example

“As an organization and an industry, we're as plugged in as we can possibly be, so we have to be deliberate about managing the flow of information and staying clear about our priorities,” says Lindsey Turrentine, vice president and editor-in-chief of reviews for CNET. “Otherwise, the work won't be as good.”

To protect her staff from getting overwhelmed, she

makes sure they know what they're supposed to deliver and sets clear timelines for the work. “That way we're able to meet our daily responsibilities and stay focused on our mission of creating innovative ways to deliver information to consumers.”

She regularly blocks off time in her own calendar and sets CNET's internal instant-messaging system to unavailable when she needs quiet, focused time. And she encourages her team members to do the same as long as they make themselves available at other times and coordinate with one another. “It's not enough to simply set the limits,” she adds. “You need to take time to explain what you're doing and why. It's my job to make sure the work gets done *and* that my staff can walk away at the end of their shifts knowing that someone else is prepared and ready to take the baton.”

CASE STUDY 2

Make Time for Your Most Important Work

“Our employees were really struggling to manage their workload,” says Steven Handmaker, chief marketing officer at Assurance, an independent insurance brokerage. Too many emails, too many meetings, and too many interruptions had brought everyone

to their breaking point.

Management decided to bring in a consultant to help. His recommendation: implement priority-work time.

Every employee at every level was encouraged to schedule a certain number of hours to complete important projects. “The consultant suggested 15 hours per week,” Steven says, “which was a huge shock.”

Nevertheless, the leadership team, including Assurance's CEO, began scheduling priority-work time in their calendars, and employees enthusiastically followed suit. “It took about six months for the entire company to get used to the new system,” Steven says. Most employees now have eight to 10 hours on their calendars blocked off each week, and everyone is responsible for supporting their colleagues and employees in doing the same. If Steven sees that his team isn't planning and using priority-work time, it's his responsibility to speak to them and find out why.

How successful has priority-work time been? “What we know for sure,” says Steven, “is that our employees are happier. We've received awards from *Fortune*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and industry organizations for being a great place to work.

But we also see internally that the rapid adoption of this practice means that it's been successful. We respect how hard everyone works, and part of that is simply letting people do their jobs.”

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Executive Summaries



“In the modern workplace, with its emphasis on connectivity and collaboration, the real problem is not how individuals manage their own time. It’s how we manage our collective time—how we work together to get the job done.”

MANAGE YOUR TEAM'S COLLECTIVE TIME
PAGE 118



Identify Your Priorities

Happiness Traps

Annie McKee | page 10

Numerous studies show that close to two-thirds of U.S. employees are bored, detached, or jaded and ready to sabotage plans, projects, and other people. Why so much unhappiness among professionals who have the capacity to shape their work lives? The author highlights three of the most common reasons—ambition, doing what’s expected of us, and overwork—which seem productive on the surface but are harmful when taken to the extreme.

To break free of these “happiness traps,” you first have to accept that you deserve happiness at work. Then you can use your emotional intelligence—particularly emotional self-awareness, emotional self-control, and organizational awareness—to understand which trap has ensnared you. Finally, you must actively seek meaning and purpose in day-to-day activities, foster hope in yourself and others, and build friendships at work.

HBR Reprint R1705D

Manage Your Work, Manage Your Life

Boris Groysberg and Robin Abrahams
page 18

Senior executives have discovered through hard experience that prospering at their level is a matter of carefully combining work and home so as not to lose themselves, their loved ones, or their foothold on success. To learn how they reconcile their professional and personal lives, the authors drew on five years’ worth of interviews with almost 4,000 executives worldwide, conducted by students at Harvard Business School, and a survey of 82 executives in an HBS leadership course. The stories and advice of these leaders reflect five main themes: defining success for yourself, managing technology, building support networks at work and at home, traveling or relocating selectively, and collaborating with your partner.

Some intriguing gender differences emerged in the survey data. For example, men still think of their family responsibilities in terms of breadwinning, whereas women often see theirs as role modeling for their children. And male executives tend to praise their partners for making positive contributions to their careers, whereas women praise theirs for not interfering. Executives of both sexes consider the tension between work and family to be primarily a woman’s problem, and most of them believe that one can’t compete in the global marketplace while leading a “balanced” life. “Earnestly trying to focus,” the authors conclude, “is what will see them through.”

HBR Reprint R1403C



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Executive Summaries



Identify Your Priorities

How Will You Measure Your Life?

Clayton M. Christensen | page 26

Harvard Business School's Christensen taught aspiring MBAs how to apply management and innovation theories to build stronger companies. But he also believed that these models could help people lead better lives. In this article, he explained how, exploring questions everyone needs to ask: How can I be happy in my career? How can I be sure that my relationship with my family is an enduring source of happiness? And how can I live my life with integrity?

The answer to the first question comes from Frederick Herzberg's assertion that the most powerful motivator isn't money; it's the opportunity to learn, grow in responsibilities, contribute, and be recognized. That's why management, if practiced well, can be the noblest of occupations; no others offer as many ways to help people find those opportunities. It isn't about buying, selling, and investing in companies, as many think.

The principles of resource allocation can help people attain happiness at home. If not managed masterfully, what emerges from a firm's resource allocation process can be very different from the strategy management intended to follow. That's true in life too: If you're not guided by a clear sense of purpose, you're likely to fritter away your time and energy on obtaining the most tangible, short-term signs of achievement, not what's really important to you.

And just as a focus on marginal costs can cause bad corporate decisions, it can lead people astray. The marginal cost of doing something wrong "just this once" always seems alluringly low. You don't see the end result to which that path leads. The key is to define what you stand for and draw the line in a safe place.

HBR Reprint R1007B



Set Boundaries

Beating Burnout

Monique Valcour | page 34

Stress is a fact of professional life, but extreme and unrelenting pressures can lead to the debilitating state we call burnout.

Three symptoms characterize burnout: exhaustion; cynicism, or distancing oneself from work; and inefficacy, or feelings of incompetence and lack of achievement. Research has linked burnout to many health problems, including hypertension, sleep disturbances, depression, and substance abuse. Moreover, it can ruin relationships and jeopardize career prospects.

Resolving burnout often requires changes at the job, team, or organizational level. But you can also take steps toward recovery and prevention on your own: Prioritize your health, shift your perspective to determine which aspects of your situation are fixed and which can be changed, reduce exposure to the most stressful activities and relationships, and seek out helpful interpersonal connections.

It's important to ward off burnout on your team as well: Insist on time for rest and renewal, set realistic work limits, boost your team's sense of control, provide meaningful recognition, and ask people what help or training they need to succeed.

HBR Reprint R1611H



Do Something Besides Work

Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life

Stewart D. Friedman | page 66

Work fills most executives' lives to the brim, leaving insufficient time for their families, their communities, and themselves. But Wharton professor Friedman suggests that, rather than view the problem as a set of trade-offs, executives use their leadership talents to benefit all four domains at once. The idea is to design experiments—small, short-term adjustments to their daily routines—that incorporate and mutually benefit the various aspects of their lives. If an experiment works out, everyone wins—employer, employee, family, and community; if it doesn't, it simply becomes a low-cost learning opportunity. Over time, the combination of small gains and lessons learned can lead to larger-scale transformation.

The "Total Leadership" process involves identifying what's important to you, identifying what's important to everyone in your life, using those insights to creatively explore possibilities for experiments, and then selecting and implementing a few at a time. Drawing on decades of experience, Friedman has distilled nine categories of experiments that offer a manageable, systematic approach to the daunting task of conceiving projects with four-way benefits.

In one such experiment, an executive might raise money for a charity her company sponsors by running a marathon with her son, thus simultaneously gaining greater visibility at work, spending more time with her family, giving back to the community, and improving her health. To move toward the goal of becoming a CEO, another executive might join the board of a nonprofit agency in his neighborhood together with his wife.

Friedman suspects that there are far more opportunities for simultaneous benefits than people realize. They are there for the taking. You just have to know how to look for them and then find the support and courage to pursue them.

HBR Reprint R0804H



Balancing Work and Family

A Working Parent's Survival Guide

Daisy Dowling | page 82

If you're passionate about your career—and about being a great mom or dad—you're facing an ongoing struggle for at least 18 years. But you can learn techniques to reduce the stress and successfully balance your professional and family roles.

The author, an executive coach who specializes in helping working parents, suggests that you start by identifying the kinds of challenges you're confronting. There are five core types: those involving *transitions* (such as returning to work after parental leave, or hiring a new caregiver); *practical* challenges (dealing with errands, appointments, and all your other responsibilities); *communication* issues (conversations and negotiations about working-parent matters); feelings of *loss* (fear that you're missing out at work or at home); and *identity* concerns (uncertainty about your priorities and how you define yourself).

To mitigate these challenges, the author recommends five powerful strategies: *Rehearse* to prepare for transitions; *audit* your commitments and *plan* your calendar so that practicalities don't overwhelm you; *frame* your working-parent messages effectively; use *"today plus 20 years"* thinking to put losses into perspective; and *revisit and recast* your professional identity and brand.

HBR Reprint R1904L

What's Really Holding Women Back?

Robin J. Ely and Irene Padavic | page 88

Ask people to explain why women remain so dramatically underrepresented in the senior ranks of most companies, and you will hear from the vast majority a lament that goes something like this: High-level jobs require extremely long hours, women's devotion to family makes it impossible to put in those hours, and so their careers inevitably suffer.

Not so, say the authors, who spent 18 months working with a global consulting firm that wanted to know why it had so few women in positions of power. Although virtually every employee the authors interviewed related a form of the standard explanation, the firm's data told a different story. Women weren't being held back because of trouble balancing work and family; men, too, suffered from that problem and nevertheless advanced. Women were held back because they were encouraged to take accommodations, such as going part-time and shifting to internally facing roles, which derailed their careers.

The real culprit in women's stalled advancement, the authors conclude, is a general culture of overwork that hurts both sexes and locks gender equality in place. To solve this problem, they argue, we must reconsider what we're willing to allow the workplace to demand of all employees.

HBR Reprint R2002C

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Executive Summaries



Balancing Work and Family

How Dual-Career Couples Make It Work

Jennifer Petriglieri | page 96

In her study of more than 100 couples around the globe, the author found that dual-career couples tend to go through three transitions when they are particularly vulnerable: when they first learn to work together as a couple; when they go through a midcareer or a midlife reinvention; and as they reach the final stages of their careers. Those who communicate at each transition about deeper work and personal issues such as values, boundaries, and fears have a better chance of emerging stronger from each one, fulfilled both in their relationships and in their careers.

HBR Reprint R1905B



Managing Others

Managing the High-Intensity Workplace

Erin Reid and Lakshmi Ramarajan
page 112

People today are under intense pressure to be “ideal workers”—totally committed to their jobs and always on call. But after interviewing hundreds of professionals in many fields, the authors have concluded that selfless dedication to work is often unnecessary and harmful. It has dysfunctional consequences not only for individuals but also for their organizations.

The authors discuss three typical strategies for coping with demanding workplaces, and the risks associated with each:

Accepting involves prioritizing the job above all else and remaining available 24/7. Because accepters fail to cultivate outside interests, they’re often slow to recover from professional setbacks. And they may be too focused on their own responsibilities to mentor others—a drawback for their organizations.

Passing involves portraying oneself as an ideal worker while quietly pursuing a life beyond the office. But passers may feel isolated from their colleagues because they are hiding parts of themselves, and their perpetuation of the ideal-worker myth keeps the pressure on everyone.

Revealing involves openly embracing non-work commitments. Revealers may unwittingly put their careers at risk, however, and bosses who penalize them may drive away talent.

So how can organizations build a healthier—and more productive—culture? Managers can act as role models by leading multifaceted lives themselves. They can reward employees for the quality and results of their work rather than the time put into it. And they can enforce reasonable work hours, require vacations, and take other steps to protect employees’ personal lives.

HBR Reprint R1606G

Manage Your Team’s Collective Time

Leslie Perlow | page 118

To solve time management challenges, experts have typically focused on improving individual habits: procrastinate less, form better to-do lists, limit email checks throughout the day. But the modern workplace is characterized by connectivity and collaboration, shifting the focus from individual players to teams. Now our collective time is what needs to be managed.

Perlow’s research shows that imposing time-based interventions for team members (like unplugging from the office one weeknight a week; working from home on a meeting-free day, including conference calls; scheduling one afternoon away from work every couple of weeks) improves individuals’ quality of life and helps the team and business succeed. Structured time-off programs based on these interventions change how teams work, allowing them to eliminate unnecessary tasks and look for efficiencies. The results include higher retention and engagement, as well as reductions in individuals’ stress. Perlow’s work with Boston Consulting Group produced such promising results that the company expanded the program to thousands of teams in 77 offices in 40 countries.

The interventions Perlow describes also address common employee preferences: a desire for more control over work time, for reducing the always-on mentality, and for recognition for extra effort, for example. They also address the need for fewer interruptions like meetings and emails, and for more focused time. Tasks can be approached in a variety of ways, and the real power of managing team time is that it provides teams with the ability to enjoy continual improvement of how to coordinate tasks, often yielding new efficiencies.

Structured time off empowers and incentivizes individual team members to optimize their collective time. By managing how much work invades employees’ time outside of work, leaders can ensure that they accomplish more while at work.

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