



# Work Life Balance Strategies of Women

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**Abstract -Work-life balance is a concept including proper prioritizing between ‘work’ (career and ambition) and ‘lifestyle’ (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation). Related, though broader, terms include ‘lifestyle calm balance’ and ‘lifestyle choices’. Most recently, there has been a shift in the workplace as a result of advances in technology. Researchers have found that employees who consider their work roles to be an important component of their identities will be more likely to apply these communication technologies to work while in their non-work domain.**

Today there are many young women who do not want to just stay at home and do house work, but want to have careers. About 64% of mothers whose youngest child was under age six, and 77% of mothers with a youngest child age 6-17 were employed in 2010, indicating that the majority of women with dependent care responsibilities cannot or do not wish to give up careers. While women are increasingly represented in the work force, they still face challenges balancing work and home life. Both domestic and market labor compete for time and energy. “For women, the results show that that only time spent in female housework chores has a significant negative effect on wages”.

We can address it. Nissan addresses it, Avon addresses it, and Merck addresses it. Big companies that don’t turn easily address it, and if they make a difference, and they have seen results, it is possible everywhere. So yes, [gender bias] is bad, and no one want to have to talk about it, but given that it’s still out there, isn’t it wonderful that we have to figure it out how to deal with it, how to address it, and how to overcome it.

## INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance is a concept including proper prioritizing between ‘work’ (career and ambition) and ‘lifestyle’ (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation). Related, though broader,

terms include ‘lifestyle calm balance’ and ‘lifestyle choices’.

The work-leisure dichotomy was invented in the mid-1800s. Paul Krasner remarked that anthropologists, use a definition of happiness that is to have as little separation as possible "between your work and your play". The expression "work-life balance" was first used in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life. In the United States, this phrase was first used in 1986.

Most recently, there has been a shift in the workplace as a result of advances in technology. As Bowswell and Olson-Buchanan stated, "increasingly sophisticated and affordable technologies have made it more feasible for employees to keep contact with work". Employees have many methods, such as emails, computers, and cell phones, which enable them to accomplish their work beyond the physical boundaries of their office. Employees may respond to an email or a voice mail after-hours or during the weekend, typically while not officially "on the job". Researchers have found that employees who consider their work roles to be an important component of their identities will be more likely to apply these communication technologies to work while in their non-work domain.

Some theorists suggest that this blurred boundary of work and life is a result of technological control. Technological control "emerges from the physical technology of an organization". In other words, companies use email and distribute smart phones to enable and encourage their employees to stay connected to the business even when they are not in the office. This type of control, as Barker argues, replaces the more direct, authoritarian control, or simple control, such as managers and bosses. As a result, communication technologies in the temporal and structural aspects of work have changed, defining a "new workplace" in which employees are more connected to the jobs beyond the boundaries of the traditional workday and

workplace. The more this boundary is blurred, the higher work-to-life conflict is self-reported by employees.

Many authors believe that parents being affected by work-life conflict will either reduce the number of hours one works where other authors suggest that a parent may run away from family life or work more hours at a workplace. This implies that each individual views work-life conflict differently.

Employee assistance professionals say there are many causes for this situation ranging from personal ambition and the pressure of family obligations to the accelerating pace of technology. According to a recent study for the Center for Work-Life Policy, 1.7 million people consider their jobs and their work hours excessive because of globalization

Work life balance in Organization for Economic Co - Operation and Development (OECD)

Finding a suitable balance between work and daily living is a challenge that all workers face. Families are particularly affected. Some couples would like to have (more) children, but do not see how they could afford to stop working. Other parents are happy with the number of children in their family, but would like to work more. This is a challenge to governments because if parents cannot achieve their desired work/life balance, not only is their welfare lowered but so is development in the country. If parents have to choose between earning money and looking after their children, the result is that there will be too few babies and too little employment.

People spend one-tenth to one-fifth of their time on unpaid work. The distribution of tasks within the family is still influenced by gender roles: men are more likely to spend more hours in paid work, while women spend longer hours in unpaid domestic work. While on average men in OECD countries spend 131 minutes per day doing unpaid work, women spend 279 minutes per day cooking, cleaning or caring. This average difference, approximately 2.5 hours per day, conceals many disparities among countries. For instance Turkish and Mexican women spend between 4.3 and 5 hours more than men working on domestic chores, while the difference is only a little over one hour in the Nordic countries.

### **Employees Working Long Hours**

An important aspect of work-life balance is the amount of time a person spends at work. Evidence suggests that long work hours may impair personal health, jeopardize safety and increase stress. The share of employees working more than 50 hours per week is not very large in OECD countries. Turkey is by far the country with

the highest proportion of people working very long hours, with more than 46%, followed by Mexico with nearly 29% and Israel with nearly a fifth of employees. Overall, men spend more hours in paid work and the percentage of male employees working very long hours across OECD countries is 12%, compared with less than 5% for women.

### **Time devoted to Leisure and Personal Care**

Furthermore, the more people work, the less time they have to spend on other activities, such as personal care or leisure. The amount and quality of leisure time is important for people's overall well-being, and can bring additional physical and mental health benefits. The average person in the OECD works 1 776 hours a year and devotes 62% of the day, or close to 15 hours, to personal care (eating, sleeping, etc.) and leisure (socializing with friends and family, hobbies, games, computer and television use, etc.). Fewer hours in paid work for women do not necessarily result in greater leisure time, as time devoted to leisure is roughly the same for men and women across the 20 OECD countries studied.

### **STRESS AND WORK LIFE BALANCE**

The number of stress-related disability claims by American employees has doubled according to the Employee Assistance Professionals Association in Arlington, Virginia. Seventy-five to ninety percent of physician visits are related to stress and, according to the American Institute of Stress, the cost to industry has been estimated at \$200 billion-\$300 billion a year. Steven L. Sauter, chief of the Applied Psychology and Ergonomics, states in his recent studies that "the workplace has become the single greatest source of stress". Michael Feuerstein, professor of clinical psychology states, "We're seeing a greater increase in work-related neuro-skeletal disorders from a combination of stress and ergonomic stressors".

It is clear that problems caused by stress have become a major concern to both employers and employees. Symptoms of stress are manifested both physiologically and psychologically. Persistent stress can result in cardiovascular disease, sexual health problems, a weaker immune system and frequent headaches, stiff muscles, or backache. It can also result in poor coping skills, irritability, jumpiness, insecurity, exhaustion, and difficulty concentrating. Stress may also perpetuate or lead to binge eating, smoking, and alcohol consumption.

The feeling that simply working hard is not enough anymore is acknowledged by many other American workers. "To get ahead, a seventy-hour work week is the

new standard. What little time is left is often divvied up among relationships, kids, and sleep." This increase in work hours over the past two decades means that less time will be spent with family, friends, and community as well as pursuing activities that one enjoys and taking the time to grow personally and spiritually.

Texas Quick, an expert witness at trials of companies who were accused of overworking their employees, states that "when people get worked beyond their capacity, companies pay the price." Although some employers believe that workers should reduce their own stress by simplifying their lives and making a better effort to care for their health, most experts feel that the chief responsibility for reducing stress should be management.

#### Formation of the "ideal worker" and gender differences

Work-life conflict is not gender-specific. However, because of the social norms surrounding each gender role, and how the organization views its ideal worker, men and women handle the work-life balance differently. Organizations play a large part in how their employees deal with work-life balance. Some companies have taken proactive measures in providing programs and initiatives to help their employees cope with work-life balance. Yet, the root of the work-life conflict may come from the organizational norms and ideologies. As a macro structure, the organization maintains the locus of power. Organizations, through its structure, practices, symbols and discourse, create and reproduce a dominant ideology. The dominant ideology is what drives organizational power and creates organizational norms.

At the top of the organizational hierarchy, the majority of individuals are males, and assumptions can be made regarding their lack of personal experience with the direct and indirect effects of work-family conflict. For one, they may be unmarried and have no thought as to what "normal" family responsibilities entail. On the other hand, the high-level manager may be married, but his wife, due to the demands of the husband's position, has remained at home, tending solely to the house and children. Ironically, these are the individuals creating and reforming workplace policies.

Workplace policies, especially regarding the balance between family/life and work, create an organizational norm in which employees must fall into. In other words, the reality of what employees experience, specifically in regards to work-life balance, is a direct result of power operating covertly through ideological controls. This is seen in the ideological norm of the "ideal worker." Many organizations view the ideal worker as one who is "committed to their work above all else". "Ideal

workers" are those that demonstrate extra-role behaviors, which are seen as positive attributes.

Often, these perceptions are placed on the female worker. Managers who perceived their female employees of maintaining high work-family conflict were presumed as not as committed to the organization, therefore not worthy of advancement. This negatively impacts working mothers as they may be "inaccurately perceived to have less commitment to their organizations than their counterparts, their advancement in organizations may be unfairly obstructed".

Working mothers often have to challenge perceptions and stereotypes that evolve as a working woman becomes a working mother. Working mothers are perceived as less competent and less worthy of training than childless women. Another study, focusing on professional jobs, found that mothers were 79 percent less likely to be hired and are typically held to a higher standard of punctuality and performance than childless women. The moment when she becomes a mother, a working woman is held at a completely different norm than her childless colleagues. In the same Cuddy et al. (2004) study, men who became fathers were not perceived as any less competent, and in fact, their perceived warmth increased.

#### Perceptions of work-life balance and gender differences

This circumstance only increases the work-life balance stress experienced by many women employees. Research conducted by the Kenexa Research Institute (KRI), a division of Kenexa, evaluated how male and female workers perceive work-life balance and found that women are more positive than men in how they perceive their company's efforts to help them balance work and life responsibilities. The results indicated a shift in women's perceptions about work-life balance. In the past, women often found it more difficult to maintain balance due to the competing pressures at work and demands at home.

#### Work-life balance concerns of men and women alike

Similar discrimination is experienced by men who take time off or reduce working hours for taking care of the family. For many employees today—both male and female—their lives are becoming more consumed with a host of family and other personal responsibilities and interests. Therefore, in an effort to retain employees, it is increasingly important for organizations to recognize this balance.

#### Young generation views on work-life balance

Young adults believe that parents should get involved and support the children both economically and

emotionally, as well as share labor equally. Young people do not believe work-life balance is possible and think it is dangerous to build a life dependent on another when relationships are unpredictable. They are looking for partners to share the house work and family work together. Men and women believe that women should have jobs before considering marriage, for better life and to be happy in marriage. Young people do not think their mother's generations were unhappy. They also do not think they were powerless because they were economically dependent.

#### Identity through work

By working in an organization, employees identify, to some extent, with the organization, as part of a collective group. Organizational values, norms and interests become incorporated in the self-concept as employees increase their identify with the organization. However, employees also identify with their outside roles, or their "true self". Employee interactions with the organization, through other employees, management, customers, or others, reinforces (or resists) the employee identification with the organization. Simultaneously, the employee must manage their "true self" identification. In other words, identity is "fragmented and constructed" through a number of interactions within and out of the organization; employees don't have just one self.

Most employees identify with not only the organization, but also other facets of their life (family, children, religion, etc.). Sometimes these identities align and sometimes they do not. When identities are in conflict, the sense of a healthy work-life balance may be affected. Organization members must perform identity work so that they align themselves with the area in which they are performing to avoid conflict and any stress as a result.

#### Work life balance of Women

Today there are many young women who do not want to just stay at home and do house work, but want to have careers. About 64% of mothers whose youngest child was under age six, and 77% of mothers with a youngest child age 6-17 were employed in 2010, indicating that the majority of women with dependent care responsibilities cannot or do not wish to give up careers. While women are increasingly represented in the work force, they still face challenges balancing work and home life. Both domestic and market labor compete for time and energy. "For women, the results show that that only time spent in female housework chores has a significant negative effect on wages".

Maternity leave is a leave of absence for an expectant or new mother for the birth and care of the baby. This is a very important factor in creating a work-life balance for families, yet in the United States most states do not offer any paid time off, for this important time in ones life. Many mothers are forced to return to work only weeks after having given birth to their children; missing out on important bonding time with their child. At this age, newborn babies and their mother are forming an important bond and the child is learning to trust and count on their parents. Yet, they are often sent to daycare and are now being cared for by a non-family member. According to the US Census, Almost two-thirds of American women (62 percent) with a birth in the last year were in the labor force in 2008

Some new mothers (and fathers) will take unpaid time off, allowed by the Family and Medical Leave Act. The FMLA entitles eligible employees of covered employers to take unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons with continuation of group health insurance coverage under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave. Eligible employees are entitled to twelve workweeks of leave in a 12-month period for:

- the birth of a child and to care for the newborn child within one year of birth;
- the placement with the employee of a child for adoption or foster care and to care for the newly placed child within one year of placement;

#### Ambitious Women Face More Obstacles than Just Work-Life Balance

For the past year and change, conversation around the globe about women and leadership has revolved around challenges of work-life balance — which most of the time actually means "work-family balance."

There are women those who are jetting out of the office at 5:30 to train for a marathon or learn Chinese or even just binge-watch Law and Order: Special Victims Unit. They're leaving "early" to take care of their children. And so we talk about having it all, leaning in, or opting out — and we talk about women who don't make it to the very top of their companies, still, as if it's a personal choice.

The truth is — as many have pointed out — that lots of ambitious people, male and female, make personal choices that take them off the path of leadership. It's also true that women are often gently but firmly nudged off this path more frequently than men, when work and family invariably clash. And that is a problem. Not just

for the women, but for the companies missing out on the benefits of diversity and the economy that's not playing with a full talent deck. But while that is a major obstacle to getting more women into senior roles, it's far from the only — or even the most important one. We agreed that it's time to shift our focus away from issues of work and life, and personal career decisions about "sitting at the table" or "leaving before you leave," to look at some of the institutional barriers that women still face.

One of these challenges is what is called as "second-generation gender bias." The basic idea: we become leaders iteratively, by taking increasingly challenging roles, learning, and then having our performance affirmed by those around us. For women, this process is often interrupted for a simple reason: when women display leadership behaviors we consider normative in men, we see them as unfeminine. When women act more feminine, we don't see them as leaders.

A previous McKinsey study also identified another barrier: women aren't given as many high-profiles, big budget, or international assignments as their male peers. These are the developmental projects that put talented women on the path to the C-Suite. Work from Catalyst identified another challenge: women aren't sponsored by higher-ups to the same degree that men are, although women do tend to have lots of mentoring relationships. This translates to women receiving lots of well-meant advice, but not a lot of growth roles.

It would be disingenuous to say that none of these challenges are related to the joys and burdens of parenting, which still disproportionately fall to women. But increasingly, men share in those joys and burdens too. And the women we're talking about — ambitious mid- to senior-level executives with their eye on the C-Suite — can afford to mitigate a lot of those burdens. So I think it's also disingenuous to portray — as so much of the popular press does — the lack of women at senior levels as evidence of some personal choice on their part.

At the same time, it's not exactly that there's a glass ceiling (or a glass cliff, or a maternal wall): the days of blatant discrimination are (mostly) behind us. Today, it's more like a glass obstacle course of a hundred hard-to-see hurdles. No wonder so many women seeking leadership roles suffer from bruised shins. No wonder so many of them never make it to the other side.

### **Work Life balance – Betterment strategies**

If you're finding it more challenging than ever to juggle the demands of your job and the rest of your life, you're not alone.

Many people are putting in extra hours, or using their smartphones to be on call when they're not physically at work.

"A lot of people are having a more difficult time finding balance in their lives because there have been cutbacks or layoffs where they work. They're afraid it may happen to them, so they're putting in more hours," says psychologist Robert Brooks, PhD, co-author of *The Power of Resilience: Achieving Balance, Confidence, and Personal Strength in Your Life*.

"But even if you don't have much control over the hours you have to work, you can ask yourself: In what other ways am I bringing greater enjoyment into my life?" Brooks says. "Focus your time and attention on things you can control."

### **Here are five ways to bring a little more balance to daily routine:**

#### **1. Build downtime into your schedule.**

When you plan your week, make it a point to schedule time with your family and friends, and activities that help you recharge. If a date night with your spouse or a softball game with friends is on your calendar, you'll have something to look forward to and an extra incentive to manage your time well so you don't have to cancel. "It helps to be proactive about scheduling," says Laura Stack, a productivity expert in Denver and author of *Super Competent: The Six Keys to Perform at Your Productive Best*. "When I go out with my girlfriends, we all whip out our cell phones and put another girls' night out on the calendar for 1 month later." Stack also plans an activity with her family, like going to a movie or the park, every Sunday afternoon. "We do this because if there's nothing on the schedule, time tends to get frittered away and the weekend may end without us spending quality time together," she says.

#### **2. Drop activities that sap your time or energy.**

"Many people waste their time on activities or people that add no value -- for example, spending too much time at work with a colleague who is constantly venting and gossiping," says Marilyn Puder-York, PhD, a psychologist and executive coach in New York and Connecticut. Her advice: Take stock of activities that don't enhance your career or personal life, and minimize the time you spend on them. You may even be able to leave work earlier if you make a conscious effort to limit the time you spend on the web and social media sites, making personal calls, or checking your bank balance. "We often get sucked into these habits that are making us much less efficient without realizing it," Stack says.

### 3. Rethink your errands.

Consider whether you can outsource any of your time-consuming household chores or errands. Could you order your groceries online and have them delivered? Hire a kid down the street to mow your lawn? Have your dry cleaning picked up and dropped off at your home or office? Order your stamps online so you don't have to go to the post office? Even if you're on a tight budget, you may discover that the time you'll save will make it worth it. Stack also suggests trading services with friends. Offer to do tasks that you enjoy or that you were planning to do anyway. "You could exchange gardening services for babysitting services," Stack says. "If you like to cook, you could prepare and freeze a couple of meals and give them to a friend in exchange for wrapping your holiday gifts."

### 4. Get moving.

It's hard to make time for exercise when you have a jam-packed schedule, but it may ultimately help you get more done by boosting your energy level and ability to concentrate. "Research shows exercise can help you to be more alert," Brooks says. "And I've noticed that when I don't exercise because I'm trying to squeeze in another half hour of writing, I don't feel as alert." Samantha Harris, a lawyer who works for a nonprofit organization in Philadelphia, goes to her gym 2 or 3 mornings a week before her family wakes up. "It's been a real boost in terms of the way I feel for the rest of the day," she says. "I feel like my head is clearer and I've had a little time to myself."

### 5. Remember that a little relaxation goes a long way.

Don't assume that you need to make big changes to bring more balance to your life. Brooks recommends

setting realistic goals, like leaving the office earlier 1 night per week. "Slowly build more activities into your schedule that are important to you," he says. "Maybe you can start by spending an hour a week on your hobby of carpentry, or planning a weekend getaway with your spouse once a year." Even during a hectic day, you can take 10 or 15 minutes to do something that will recharge your batteries. "Take a bath, read a trashy novel, go for a walk, or listen to music," Stack says. "You have to make a little time for the things that ignite your joy."

### CONCLUSION

We can address it. Nissan addresses it, Avon addresses it, and Merck addresses it. Big companies that don't turn easily address it, and if they make a difference, and they have seen results, it is possible everywhere. So yes, [gender bias] is bad, and no one wants to have to talk about it, but given that it's still out there, isn't it wonderful that we have to figure it out how to deal with it, how to address it, and how to overcome it.

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