

Work Life Balance Conundrum

By Andrea Chilcote

How provocative, this subject of work-life balance. The very word “balance” is itself controversial.

- *Does “balance” exist, or is the act of combining a career and a life outside that career a perpetual test of one’s ability to prioritize?*



“Balance means things are equal. They are not.”

- *Can meaningful, purposeful work even be thought of as separate from or partitioned outside of one’s “life?”*
- *Are those that struggle with finding balance really struggling with finding and living in integrity with their own identity, versus who others might want or imagine them to be?*

For the answers to these questions, I talked with colleagues that are concerned with this topic, both as senior leaders in their organizations and in their own personal lives.

Is *Balance* a Bad Choice of Words?

*Linda Fitzpatrick, Senior Vice President of Human Resources for Hyseq Pharmaceuticals, works three-day weeks, focusing the rest of her time on family, community and friends. At this stage in a vibrant career that has included a role as Investor Relations Lead during the Genentech merger with Roche Pharmaceuticals, she has absolutely no ambiguity about her current choices, which she says are very different than *balance*. “Balance means things are equal. They are not.”*

Success is a matter of prioritizing – sometimes each second – a multitude of decisions based on one’s clear choices and values.

It’s all about the choices we make – consciously. “I do not buy the idea of *balance*,” says Fitzpatrick. “I don’t think it exists. If there is balance, everyone gets the lowest common denominator. I do believe in choices. Choices give us options and opportunities and it is in acting on those choices that we are in a position of strength.”

Priorities and choices do have consequences; indeed Fitzpatrick admits that while she is highly valued in her role at work, the company would like to have more of her.

Fitzpatrick may have cleared up one conundrum with her comments. Some colleagues I spoke to about this issue, while very clear about their values, choices and priorities, often said: “I feel very out of balance most of the time.” Perhaps this is because certain roles or areas of focus take the spotlight at different times in our lives. If we have *chosen* to focus on those areas, consciously, maybe we need to relax about the others that are less important.

The Question of Purpose

Kathleen Orlay just left her position as National Director of Leadership and Executive Development for Cox Communications. An author, poet, musician and close friend to many, Orlay is bringing her work and talent to a broader audience via her own consulting practice. She made this choice based on her desire to express her creativity in more personally

authentic ways.

While agreeing philosophically with Fitzpatrick, Orlay does not view *balance* as meaning that all things are equal. She sees balance as a symmetry or centered-ness. “The magic is in being able to step back and find your clear sense of center, or source.”

The idea that real clarity comes from a much deeper, even spiritual source was a repeated theme. “Who I am at the core is what my work is,” says Orlay. “And that shows up in the many roles I play in life, my *job* being only one of them. When you love your work, the distinction between life and work blurs.” In fact, this past year she looked in this mirror herself to arrive at her career decision.

Diane Liguori is Vice President of Human Resources for CV Therapeutics. Her family consists of her husband, two teenage stepsons, a three-year-old, and a 20-month-old. She says that one of the greatest gifts she can give her children is being a role model for doing work that you love and that is purposeful. She is quite clear that success is a matter of prioritizing – sometimes each second – a multitude of decisions based on one’s clear choices and values.

Diane Liguori spoke about purpose; “why we are here,” and said that ultimately, the choices we make in

integrity are born from that place. If our work is meaningful to us, our companies certainly benefit, and, according to Liguori, our other relationships benefit as well. She cites the importance, to her, of having her children see their parents doing work they love.

We Live in a World of Judgment

People who have the anxiety under control generally acknowledge the distinction between trying to do what other people want or expect you to do, versus following your own conscience, heart or value system. While the urge to be popular, to please, or “to do it all” tempts at every decision point, those that suffer less stress or anxiety appear to be those who are clear about who they are.

Rebecca Gardiner is Senior Vice President of Human Resources and Organizational Dynamics for Connetics Corporation. She describes herself as an “intense classic overachiever.” Gardiner derives her sense of fulfillment from being able to powerfully contribute through a strategic role at work, while nurturing a young family. She does not believe in or give in to outsider’s expectations as to how she should manage her life.

Gardiner knows the difference between growing, loving, and nurtur-

ing her family and being able to cook and clean like June Cleaver. She can distinguish between society's often-misguided expectations and her own comfort in who she is and what works for her.

Liguori would also have us save the stress for what matters. What are the true "I have to's?" she asks herself, sometimes on an hour-by-hour basis. She can do that because she is quite clear about who and what is important in her life. Stress from shuffling and juggling schedules to meet your own needs, for example, is very different from the stress of feeling *victimized* by other people's demands and expectations. Fitzpatrick says: "Making choices based upon one's priorities is very different from being a victim of the inevitable."

So regardless of the definition you hold for the word "balance," the message from these four women living the challenge is clear: at any given moment, or at any stage of life we have the capacity to make choices and live our lives from those choices. And, if our decisions are made from a place of clarity about who we are and what we want, they free rather than restrict. The notion that flexibility and focus are mutually exclusive is false; in fact one's *fulfillment* in work and in life may depend on balancing these two qualities, versus balancing work and life itself.

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Andrea has more than 14 years experience in performance-based change management with companies in diverse business sectors. She works with Fortune 500 companies to guide the leadership development aspect of large scale change efforts. She formed Morningstar Ventures to help today's companies create sustainable change in performance by influencing and enhancing leadership. Andrea is recognized industry-wide having authored numerous development programs throughout her career. She received her Bachelor of Science from Millikin University, her Consulting Practices Certification from the Meridian Institute, and she completed graduate studies at University of Kentucky, Lexington.

