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## Of balance and boundaries

Work-life balance often refers to keeping work at work. But the real trick is keeping home at home

by Geoff Griffin

While there is a great deal of chatter in the business world about finding an appropriate work-life balance, it seems odd that such discussions generally seem to flow in only one direction — how to keep work out of the way of the rest of your life. Such advice may not always be practical depending on your financial obligations, or even useful depending on your line of work. There's also a very good chance that, as a business leader, you view your work as a challenge you enjoy, rather than a chore that drains energy from the rest of your existence. And even if you want to increase the "life" part of the work-life balance, one way of doing so might be to become more effective at work so you're better able to relax and focus on things at home.

"You care about family, but you care about business too," says Jim Bird, CEO of [WorkLifeBalance.com](http://WorkLifeBalance.com), which offers seminars on the topic that is the company's

namesake. "After all, the first word in work-life balance is 'work.' It's just as important to leave your personal life at home."

Whatever the reason, looking at work-life balance from the unusual perspective of trying to keep your personal life out of the way of your work life could have positive impacts in both areas of your life. Consider the following strategies for finding your balance.

### One calendar for one full life

Bird points out that a major source of inefficiency at work is "unnecessary mental intrusions that are the result of unresolved personal issues." He recommends keeping both your personal and professional schedules in the same calendar. If you are having difficulty getting a personal issue out of your head while at work, pull out the calendar and set aside a time outside of work you will devote to addressing the problem,

whether it be through your own efforts or talking with a spouse or children. Once you've committed to spending a set amount of time on the problem, "Then you know you don't need to worry about them anymore," Bird says. He also notes, "When you get more done at work, it reduces your stress away from the job," so the system can help in both areas of life.

### Don't bother me at work

Part of Bird's strategy outlined above includes "communicating to your family and friends, 'When I'm at work, I'm at work.' They tend to realize it and respect it." In turn, since you've been allowed to give your full attention to work, you are freed up to give your family your full time and attention away from the job. Bird has developed a system where this can be done through "meetings," where serious personal issues (such as those you set aside time for as outlined above) get

discussed and resolved, and “dates” (or play time), where serious topics are not allowed to get in the way of the fun.

### Prioritize, then subcontract your personal life

Gerardo Okhuysen, associate professor of organizational behavior at the University of Utah's Eccles School of Business, points out that for CEOs, “The biggest thing is that prioritizing comes naturally to them in business,” but not when they leave the office. “Not all aspects of family or leisure life are the same,” he says. “You need to look at what part of your personal life you want to deal with and what part you don't.”

When it comes to the latter category, “Take that part of your personal life and hire it out.” This might include such duties as driving, house cleaning or yard services. Reducing the amount of “work” you have to do outside of work will allow you to better enjoy your personal and family time and leave you more rejuvenated and ready to perform when you return to work.

### Take advantage of technology

“I think one of the great gifts of this century is all of the things you can do at home now,” says Kaye Terry Hanson, assistant professor of organizational leadership and strategy at BYU's Marriott School of Business. One could argue that technological advances have only blurred the lines between home and work, thus creating greater opportunity for unproductive overlap. But work-at-home technology can also be an advantage if it allows you to knock off in the afternoon to spend time with a child and then catch up with work later that evening after putting the same child to bed. Without that option, you might spend hours of your workday just grousing about what you're missing at home.

### Tap into Utah's culture

“People in Utah place a tremendous value on time with family,” Okhuysen says. “That culture is so strong here, as a CEO you just have to plug into it. It enables you in a way that isn't available in other parts

of the country.” For example, if you as a business leader set Sunday as a day off, that signals to everyone else they can take it off, too. But they should also be ready to show up and get the job done on Saturday. Okhuysen also notes that, if you are so inclined, “You can also operate against the culture and tell everyone to take Saturday off instead of Sunday.”

### To thine own self be true

Hanson offers one last bit of advice for time-starved businesspeople: follow your gut to find the right balance.

“There's this general thought out there that there is this ideal sense of balance,” he says. “I'm not sure you can get it from somebody else. We begin to be pharisaic about it. In the end, it's something we've all got to find out for ourselves.” ■

## Regulating intra-office romances

When work and pleasure come to the office together every day, should your policy be to live and let live or stomp it out completely?

The problems of personal life getting in the way at work don't only affect you as a business leader, but the employees you manage as well.

Mark Wagner, an attorney specializing in employment law with VanCott Bagley Cornwall & McCarthy, notes that “CEOs expect to manage a business, but it's also managing people, and that includes all of the weaknesses and strengths that people have.”

And those strengths and weaknesses can lead to workplace romances, which in turn can lead to a variety of problems, not the least of which is lawsuits. Wagner points to a study published in 2006 by the Society for Human Resource Management and the *Wall Street Journal's* CareerJournal.com, which found

that 40 percent of employees have been involved in a workplace romance, but at the same time more than 70 percent of companies did not have written or verbal policies to address such issues.

How far can businesses go in regulating relationships? Wagner says: “A strict ban on office relationships would be the best legal approach, but it doesn't work. It's still going to happen, but it's going to go underground where you won't hear about it and you can't manage it.”

Wagner doesn't counsel a live-and-let-live plan of action either, but recommends finding a middle ground. “It's probably better to accommodate some relationships rather than be too far one way or the other,” he says. That might include written policies that get relationships out in the open so all of the parties, including management, know what they are dealing with, and also know what will be expected of all parties if the romance ends.

“Generally speaking,” Wagner says, “companies and individuals should do what they can to keep work and life as separate as possible, but you have to realize how far you can go in regulating that.” ■ — GG