

A push for daily harmony is changing the way we weigh in on life.

BY DONNA SHRYER



THE CHALLENGE OF **BALANCE**

NIGEL MARSH, international raconteur and author of *Fit, Fifty and Fired-Up*, spoke about work-life balance during a TED conference, and to inspire the packed audience, he offered his personal idea of balanced perfection:

Wake up well rested. Have sex. Walk the dog. Have breakfast with my wife and children. Have sex again. Drive the kids to school on the way to the office. Do three hours' work. Play a sport with a friend at lunchtime. Do another three hours' work. Meet some mates in the pub for an early evening drink. Drive home for dinner with my wife and kids. Meditate for half an hour. Have sex. Walk the dog. Have sex again. Go to bed.

With a straight face, Marsh closed by asking his audience, "How often do you think I have that day?"

REALITY CHECK

It turns out that Marsh wasn't looking to inspire balanced bliss but rather to drive home a two-pronged observation: You can't schedule balance, but you can grab moments and make the most of them. "Thinking work-life balance can be achieved on a daily basis is unrealistic. Most days you'll just work damn hard at your job—and that's fine, as long as you can look at the last month as a whole and honestly say you had a balanced life," he says.

Micro-managing balance is ridiculous, as Marsh's agenda proves, and it may very likely replace one problem with another, stresses Jim Bird, founder and CEO of WorkLifeBalance.com. "There are four quadrants in your life that need attention: work, family, friends and self. If you decide that your goal is to devote 25 percent

of your time to each quadrant each day, all you'll achieve is 100 percent guilt. Life is dynamic—fluid—and you can't force life into a formula. Today's balance may mean working less. Tomorrow it means working more. What's important is that you get the most possible value out of the time you do invest in each quadrant."

MAKING IT WORK

Bird recalls one particular ladder-climbing corporate executive who participated in his work-life balance workshop and later reported back that her 7-year-old was thrilled with all the extra mother-daughter time. "The irony is that this woman was spending more time than usual at the office," Bird explains. "But when this woman was with her daughter, the BlackBerry was off, the laptop was closed and the tablet was in its case. To the daughter, it

felt like more time, and it proves that you can't measure work-life balance in literal minutes."

Making every moment count is a learned skill, Bird says, and his tool of choice is a focus strategy he dubbed Person of the Moment, or PM. To illustrate, Bird offers an all-too-common scenario.

A coworker walks up to your desk, where you're working on a report as your email dings and your phone beeps. How many persons are involved in this moment, Bird asks. The answer is five. There's you and the coworker, as well as the person who assigned the report, the person who sent the email and the person who made the phone call.

Bird asks and answers another question, "Who is your Person of the Moment? Nobody! When you're scattered all over, step back, pick a PM and give that person your undivided attention. You just balanced that moment. You made your Person of the Moment feel respected; you yourself likely enjoyed the moment; and I'll bet you achieved something. Balance enough moments and you'll eventually strike a balanced life where each quadrant gets valuable time. It won't be equal time, but it will be valuable time."

DUCKS IN A ROWE

One approach to work-life balance that's garnering attention from researchers and corporations alike is the Results Only Work Environment, aka ROWE. ROWE is a management strategy where employees are evaluated on results—only results—rather than physical presence behind a desk. The goal is to increase the company's performance by cultivating an environment where employees manage all demands in their lives, from workday to life obligations.

Jody Thompson, co-founder of CultureRx, co-creator of ROWE, and co-author of the book *Why Work Sucks and How to Fix It*, stresses that ROWE does not tell employees how to achieve a work-life balance but rather encourages employees to find that balance on their own. "This isn't a flexibility program that says you must work at a certain time, but I'm going to let you be flexible about where you work. ROWE is about telling an employee here are the measurable results you must achieve; now off you go," she says. "The manager's only concern is objective results, and your performance is no longer measured by time sitting in a chair. It's measured by how well you do your job."

A research study co-directed by University of Minnesota sociology professor Phyllis Moen found that a ROWE environment does indeed work. It is possible, she says, "to broaden access to schedule control and thereby relieve work-family conflicts and improve work-family fit for more workers."

As Moen delves deeper into the ROWE concept, one can't help but wonder which came first, a workplace environment that gives employees control over when and where they do their job or the Gen-X, Gen-Y and millennials' innate need for this environment. "The new workforce doesn't buy into the idea that work is the only form of success," Moen stresses. "For these generations, their identity is about work, hobbies, relationships with family...everything that makes them who they are. It's partially because they saw what happened to baby boomers, who traded their time and commitment for job security, pensions and guaranteed raises. That contract is destroyed. In its place, Gen-X, Gen-Y and

(TECHNOLOGY!)

Smartphones deliver life on steroids, plugging us into interminable data updates and 24/7 communication capabilities—all in a pocket-sized rectangle. For some uber-achievers, however, the very thing that makes them stronger, fiercer and faster has resulted in an unhealthy addiction.

In a study conducted by Helsinki Institute for Information Technology HIIT and Intel Labs, researchers found evidence that smartphones can be habit-forming, with many users suffering what's dubbed "checking habits"—repetitive checks of email, texts and social media applications. These checks, averaging 34 per day, are not necessary but compulsive, the report states, and they blur the line further between work and life. It's an iShame, isn't it?



millennials demand more time control, which allows them to fit work into life and life into work."

ME, MYSELF AND I

According to Marsh, Bird, Thompson and Moen, there are roughly 7 billion different ways to balance those four quadrants—work, family, friends and self—because the solution is unique for each person on planet earth. "Everyone lives on their own moving platform of multi-layered changes," Moen says. "There is no blueprint to follow, and every person has to make his or her own way."

Taking a purely pragmatic viewpoint, Marsh offers one final reason why we have to each figure out our own path toward balance: "If you don't design your own life, someone else will design it for you, and you may not like their idea of balance." 🍷

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