

Chapter 12

Building a Framework to Achieve Work–Life Balance: Advice From a Co–Working Couple

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ABSTRACT

Based on their trials and errors as a co-working couple over a two-year period, the authors developed and refined a series of actionable steps for others to adopt when attempting to balance their home life with their work life. They note what sparse academic literature is available for co-working couples, identify issues and problems, and offer various recommendations on developing balance through reflection, self-care, and effective communication. They conclude that the process of developing a personal framework for work-life balance is just as much a personal endeavor as it is a team endeavor and will require constant work and revisions in order to be truly effective in the long run.

INTRODUCTION

The Term “Work-Life balance” has become something a buzzword in our culture today. The term itself is creating quite a bit of controversy over what it is and what it is not, as well as how to achieve this ideal. A quick Google search offers up thousands of results on how to create the perfect work-life balance: including what that balance should look like, a wide range of definitions of what that balance should ultimately include, all of the reasons why it is so important, and conversely why it is an unattainable fiction (Afful, 2013; Eddington, Hughes-Kirchubel, & Buzzanell, 2019; Lester, 2015; Moen & Sweet, 2002; Philipsen, & Bostic, 2010; Sirgy, & Lee, 2018). For the purposes of this chapter, **work-life balance** is defined by the authors as *the personal feelings of emotional and mental stability that comes from having realistic expectations of personal limits, a willingness to be emotionally reflective, and creating*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3519-6.ch012

healthy boundaries between work life and home life. No system is perfect, and a single framework cannot fit the needs of each individual. Instead, this chapter aims to present reflective questions that will lead the reader to a better understanding of self, and at the very least, offer a starting point to develop personal routines, habits, and communication styles for co-working couples.

The Authors

In order to better understand the viewpoint in which this chapter is written, it might be useful to get to know us and our specific backgrounds. We would like to start by acknowledging the privileges that come from writing this chapter in the perspective of a White, middle-class, and heterosexual married couple. This no doubt plays a role in the way we operate professionally and personally. We have been a couple since 2005 and married since 2010, so at the writing of this chapter, that is just shy of 15 years. We are also parents to two boys (aged four and six), have two dogs, a laundry list of hobbies, elementary school, and preschool events, and attempt to enjoy the multitude of experiences that Knoxville has to offer to young families such as ours. Needless to say, there is always a lot to try and balance.

We both geared our careers toward academia early on; Don towards technology and software programming, Amanda towards libraries and preservation, so we have on more than one occasion worked within the same institution but not the same department. However, starting January 2018, that changed when we began working within the same department at the John C. Hodges library at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. This campus is the flagship campus for the state university system and a 225-year-old land grant Institution. The library itself employs roughly 70 full-time staff and faculty members.

Amanda works in the Betsy B. Creekmore Special Collections and University Archives department as the Preservation Technician. This role oversees collection care for Special Collections in addition to care and repair of materials from several other on-campus libraries. Her duties include book repairs, building custom housings for collection materials, monitoring and assessing building climates, assessing materials for and assisting with digitization, supervising and training students, as well as everything that falls under the “other duties as assigned” category.

Don’s official title is IT Analyst III, but can more accurately be described as the supervisor for a team of programmers who design, develop, and implement software for the university libraries. In this role, he utilizes project management skills, navigates conflict resolution, encourages open communication, and readily invites constructive criticism. One of the things that Digital Initiatives helps to maintain is the library’s digital collection, as his team helped to build the platform the library currently uses for the University Institutional Repository. While it is rare that we work together on projects directly, occasionally, we can have a lot of overlap.

BACKGROUND

While researching work-life balance in academia, there seemed to be a lack of current published articles on co-working couples. We found that there is very often a bias towards writing about differences between baby-boomers and millennials (Ashlock & Atay, 2019), differences between men and women (Eddington, Hughes-Kirchubel, & Buzzanell, 2019; Hampsten, 2019), and creating “family friendly” workspaces (Perrigino, Dunford, & Wilson, 2018; Philipsen & Bostic, 2010) but as far as articles on co-working were concerned, we didn’t find much published recently (within the last ten years) or specifically relating to

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