



Rethinking Work-Life Balance

The essence of a healthy career is work that fulfills and rewards you. Such work is possible, however, only if and when you are employed at what you most like to do and do best. It must involve the development and expression of the inherent capability—the special skill—which all of us possess. I call it your Natural because it is an intrinsic part of your persona and the key to being the best you can be.

Unfortunately, many maybe even most of us don't even know what our Natural is. That's why there has been so much focus, in recent years, on helping people achieve a "work-life balance." The term implies that work is a negative activity that has no personal value other than a paycheck which is almost always less than what we want or need. Our jobs cannot lift us up, but they can drag us down, so we must find a way to counteract them. We must balance our day-to-day experience in the workplace with activities that occur someplace else and do have enduring value. And sadly, survey after survey confirms that balance is exactly what a growing number of Americans are struggling to achieve in their lives.

Why is this so? Why are so many American workers determined to spend less of their waking day at work?

- For some, of course, it is a reaction to the bullying of their employers. They have been asked to do too much and to work too long. They seek balance in their careers so they can still have a life and enjoy their relationships with family and friends.
- For others, on the other hand, the push for balance is caused by what's missing from their work. They are investing a third or more of their lives in their career, and that endeavor lacks any sense of purpose or meaning for them. They seek balance in their careers so their employment experience is both appropriately engaging and consistently satisfying.

For the first group, work-life balance is a benefit that employers provide at their option. It is controlled by employers and subject to fluctuations in their fortunes. This kind of balance is important to have, to be sure, but in the 21st Century workplace, it is fast becoming an anomaly.

- When times are good, the benefit is hard to get because employers want to pull every penny of profit possible out of the strong market.
- When times are bad, the benefit is hard to get because employers are cutting costs to preserve every penny of profit possible in the weak market.

The net effect is that employers talk incessantly about work-life balance—they even promise to provide it—but more often than not, the words aren't balanced with action.

For the second group, in contrast, work-life balance is self-created. It is controlled by the individual and is largely unaffected by the fortunes of any employer. The individual seeks and accepts only those jobs where they can be their personal best. They transform their work from a negative to a positive experience by structuring their employment so that it has enduring value for them. In essence, they achieve balance by assigning their interests in the workplace as much priority as those of their employers. They do that by focusing their career on the development and expression of their Natural.

This kind of work-life balance is much more resilient and far healthier for us. We are able to do what's best for us, at work as well as in the rest of our lives. We get rid of the daily grind and, instead, commit ourselves to the daily greatness we are all capable of achieving. And, now, more than ever before, it is possible to create such an individually inspired work-life balance.

Why is that so? What makes today different from yesterday? The labor market. Employers now find themselves engaged in a War for Talent. It's not a War for Any Talent, however; it's a War for the Best Talent. There aren't enough people who are skilled in critical fields or are superior performers or both to go around so employers are competing desperately to hire them. This situation is your Emancipation Proclamation ... if you know how to realize your freedom.

The key to achieving a work-life balance that you control is being the best you can be at what you most like to do and do best. In essence, you must make a personal commitment to working at developing and expressing your natural talent—to performing at the top of your game each and every day on-the-job. If you do that, you'll not only find employment that fulfills and rewards you, but you'll have your choice of employers that will balance their expectations with what's best for you. That puts life in your work as well as work in your life.

Thanks for reading,
Peter

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