



Achieving a work life balance

If your life feels like all work and no play, maybe it's time to think about how you could achieve a better work life balance.

Before you sigh and dismiss the idea as impossible, ask yourself whose life is it anyway? If you don't have the courage to shape the life that you want, it's unlikely that anyone else will be good enough to do it for you.

So go for it and take a fresh look at how you could improve your work life balance.

What would a better work life balance mean to you?

Achieving a more harmonious work life balance could mean entirely different things to different people.

Perhaps you're longing to work fewer hours and spend more time with your family.

Maybe you need to get help with your domestic chores and free up more of your spare time. Or possibly, you need to do more rather than less — by getting involved in a community project or new social activity that could enrich your life.

Long hours hamper our lives

There's no doubt that the long hours culture is taking its toll on many of our lives. Just take a look at some of these facts:

- British workers clock up 36 million hours of free overtime each year, with one in three of us refusing to take all our holidays for fear of the backlog of work when we return¹
- Four in ten people think that working long hours has a negative impact on our family lives, with 35 percent of us thinking it harms our relationship with our children and a third saying it damages our relationship with our partners²
- Many working parents don't eat healthily or take regular exercise and feel that work dominates their lives, leaving family life to suffer as a result³
- Working long hours leads to increased levels of stress, irritability, exhaustion and depression³
- In contrast, part-time workers think they are more productive and people who work flexibly are less likely to take time off work for sickness⁴

Choose flexible working

If you're working full time, you probably know all too well how little time you have to embrace all the other aspects of your life. Your family and friends. Enjoying your home. Healthy eating and exercise. Sleep, oh blissful sleep. And did anyone mention, having fun?

But you don't have to resign yourself to the daily grind. Instead you could look for a more flexible job, or ask your employer for a flexible working arrangement.

That could mean working part-time — either working shorter hours each day, or fewer days per week. Or it could involve having flexi-time, working from home or job sharing with another employee.

Find the working pattern to suit you

Some people even choose to work longer hours for fewer days each week, or to work term-time only. It entirely depends what's workable for both you and your employer. And yes, it may mean taking a pay cut. But only you can decide the price of your health and happiness.

It's worth remembering that anyone can ask for flexible working — although it's not an automatic right to have your request accepted.

Who's entitled to request flexible working?

In particular, your right to request flexible working is protected by law if you've worked for your employer for at least six months and you have a child under six, a disabled child under 18, or you are caring for an adult spouse, partner, relative or other person who lives at your address⁵.

For more information about how to apply for flexible working arrangement, go to the [Directgov.uk](https://www.direct.gov.uk) website.

Having it all needn't mean doing it all

If you're determined to continue working the same hours, there are of course other ways to lighten your work-load.

Our mothers and grandmothers may have fought for equality, but after a long day's work and with a long evening's housework ahead of you, you may wonder if it's such a fair deal after all.

It's ok to ask for help

It may be tempting to try and do everything yourself, or to spend your precious leisure time bickering with your partner about whose turn it is to do the Hoovering, but if you're looking for a better work life balance, it may simply be easier to choose the path of least resistance.

That's right. Get some help. Hire a cleaner. Send out the ironing. Pay a gardener to spruce up the garden. Book a babysitter. Stop being a martyr and go and have some fun. It's not always the cheapest option, but if you can afford it, it's probably money very well spent.

Discover a new dimension in your life

Sometimes the best way to solve a problem, is to stop worrying it over and turn your attention elsewhere. So if you'd love to enjoy a better work life balance, add a new dimension to your non-work life and allow the balance to adjust naturally.

If you're fed up with the amount of time you're spending at work, find a reason to leave on time. Yes it might be old advice, but taking up a new hobby could be just what you need to revive your personal life.

Exercising the body, or mind, is a great way to enhancing your well-being. So use your imagination and think of a new activity that you've always fancied doing. Book a dance class, sign up for an evening class, or join a gym (as long as that won't give you even more reason to loiter at work).

Even something as simple as organising a get together with the gang, a cinema trip with the kids, or a weekend away, could boost your mood and help you to remember that there is a life after work.

By focusing more on being happier and more productive in your private time, you may even find that your work life benefits from your new-found enthusiasm for life.

Summary

- Think about what a better work life balance could mean to you
- Assess the impact that long working hours are having on your life
- Consider adopting flexible working patterns
- Remember that it's ok to ask for help
- Delegate the domestic chores if possible
- Take up a new hobby
- Discover a new dimension in your personal life

References:

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3. Time, Health and the Family: What Working Families Want, 2004, Working Families
4. http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/asp/family_zone/m_press_room.asp
5. http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Employees/WorkingHoursAndTimeOff/DG_10029491

A wide range of women's health resources are available at www.healthywomen.org.uk

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