

The Inefficient Frontier: Work–Life Balance

HOW CAN BUSY PROFESSIONALS MANAGE THE COMPETING PRIORITIES OF A FULL LIFE?

By Lori Pizzani

“There is no work–life balance; there is only life,” says Mark Chussil, author of the book *Nice Start: Questions Only You Can Answer to Create the Life Only You Can Live* and a consultant for Fortune 500 companies. “The issue of ‘balance’ is really about what you want to do in your life.”

Other experts on time management agree. “There is no one-size-fits-all solution for a balanced life. Cookie-cutter solutions don’t work,” says Debbie Williams, a personal productivity coach in Houston, Texas. Simply coming to this realization can relieve stress for many people: “Sometimes, just knowing that they haven’t overlooked or rejected the perfect plan takes an enormous amount of stress off individuals, knowing that they didn’t mess up and that they are not alone in this feeling of being overwhelmed.”

“True and equal balance in life is virtually impossible. Life is unpredictable, and that makes balance so much harder to achieve,” says Jill Haseltine, a professional motivational speaker and coach in Tampa, Florida,

as well as founder and CEO of Deliberate Nation. “How can you spend the same amount of time and energy every day on all of the priorities you have if things in your life are constantly changing?”

The quest to find the “perfect” work–life balance points to the true core of the problem.

“There is neither a ‘perfect’ work–life balance nor is there a [single] solution. The first key step in gaining some satisfaction with work and life is to give up these notions,” says Stacy Kim, a consultant and career/life coach and founder of Life Junctions in New York City. “Individuals have to first recognize that each has a unique blend of resources, demands, attitudes, talents, and desires and that this mix is constantly evolving. Therefore, what works for one person or works at a given time won’t work for another person or even for the same person at another point in time.”

“That term [work–life balance] did not exist before 1987, the same year the personal computer came out,” says Jeff Cannon, an executive coach in New York City. “As people started bringing work home more and more often, they also saw the old work–life paradigm break down. What I teach executives and other working professionals is that there is only life and work is a component of life, just like marriage, children, and vacations are.”

He says the key to bringing work into balance with your life is to look for work (plus a work environment) that supports your life: “When you find a corporate culture to support your own integrity, your own sense of being, it no longer becomes work; it really becomes a part of your life.”

PRACTICAL BENEFITS

Achieving a sense of work–life balance goes beyond a subjective “happiness” benefit. Although the goal is elusive, maintaining a sense or feeling of a balanced life can be vital to everyday wellness as well as productivity at jobs, according to experts consulted for this article.

“When we aren’t being true to our values, our aspirations, and our wants/needs, we feel uneasy and conflicted,” says Alicia Clark, a licensed clinical psychologist in Washington, DC. “This can be obvious in thoughts or can be more obscured, evidencing as a sort of malaise or sense of general frustration. Ignoring areas of your life that are important to you will cause anxiety.”

“A poor work–life balance can lead to stress in addition to low output at the job,” says Lynda Zugec, founder and managing director of The Workforce Consultants, a human resources consulting firm in New York City. “Achieving work–life balance is integral to general health and wellness and increases work satisfaction and motivation.”

Personal life and professional life affect each other, so trying to “compartmentalize” isn’t a good strategy, according to Judi Cinéas, a Palm Beach, Florida-based psychotherapist. “When those [personal relationships] are lacking, the people in your life can sometimes get the message that they are not as important to you, that they are not valued.” This can cause loved ones to withdraw and become less available to you for your own emotional support.

To improve performance or boost retention, some employers are beginning to adapt to changing circumstances and expectations. For example, Goldman Sachs is among those financial services companies working to provide better balance for employees. “The goal is for our analysts to want to be here for a career,” says David Solomon, co-head of the investment banking division at Goldman Sachs. “We want them to be challenged but also to operate at a pace where

KEY POINTS

Experts agree that the first step to achieving a sense of balance is ranking what is most important and setting priorities accordingly.

Make a plan to manage your time so that the most important aspects of your life will receive the most attention.

Set strict guidelines and boundaries for your work–life plan but be flexible enough to reset limits as life changes.

Stress and anxiety about work–life balance can hinder as well as help, potentially impairing productivity but also providing information about priorities.

they're going to stay here and learn important skills that are going to stick. This is a marathon, not a sprint."

In early 2013 the firm crafted a "Junior Banker Taskforce" composed of senior staff members representing various Goldman businesses worldwide. The recommendations of the taskforce, which focused on improving the day-to-day work environment and promoting career development, include encouraging more consistent and predictable periods when people are out of the office and planning for more efficient work for teams through the use of new technology.

"Our goal with the changes is to have people think about their work upfront and to shift their working hours and create predictable time off," said Goldman Sachs in a statement released to *CFA Institute Magazine*. "One goal is to make it so that the emphasis is on completing work during the week. Weekend work should be for critical client activity and our goal is for people to have more time off at the weekend."

The prevailing stereotype that finding a satisfactory work-life balance is just a woman's issue because women tend to take on more of the parenting and household responsibilities is outmoded, says Jennifer Sewell, vice president of clinical services at Ceridian Life Works in St. Petersburg, Florida, which provides employee assistance programs to 48,000 businesses in North America: "We are finding that men are just as invested in life experiences outside of work. More men have lost jobs and are stay-at-home dads while women are increasingly the breadwinners and growing their careers."

"Stress has always been a top outreach area for us, but in working with employers [and others] we are calling it 'work-life integration,'" says Mary Jane Konstantin, senior vice president at Ceridian LifeWorks in Arlington, Virginia. Konstantin says her firm is fielding more questions from employers who have elevated work-life integration programs to a higher priority and now see such programs as a tool to attract and retain top talent. Many of the firm's online tools for employees have been migrated to mobile devices so they can be used anywhere.

INTROSPECTION AND PLANNING

These and other experts agree that finding the right balance starts with taking a good hard look at ourselves, our lives, and what we really want.

"Draw a circle to represent a pie, then carve it up into the current aspects of your life drawn to scale: career, health and wellness pursuits, family, community, and spirituality," says Susan Cucuzza, an executive/leadership coach in Cleveland, Ohio, and founder of Live Forward LLC. "Then, draw the same circle the way you want it to be. Ask yourself what you want to change to create balance."

Next, put each slice of your pie into perspective by describing your goals, such as envisioning what a wellness journey would be like. Envisioning allows people create an action plan, instead of saying, "Oh, I'll get around to it." Periodically reevaluating your pie, goals, and actions will allow you to realize that you can't do it all and provides perspective.

How we think about time is another factor. "You need to give up any hope that balance is something you can achieve

How Investment Professionals Balance Work and Personal Life

To find his work-life balance, John Manley, CFA, chief equity strategist at Wells Fargo Funds Management in New York (the adviser to the Wells Fargo Advantage Funds), always made it a point to end his workday at 5:30. "I like being home at dinner time. Our family has great talks, and we have learning time. I don't often do dinner meetings," he says. In fact, he often discourages folks from going to dinner with him. Manley says he will tell a potential dinner partner, "Much as I'd love having dinner with you, go home and be with your family."

Flexibility is the guiding principle for Phillip Christenson, CFA, who last year started Phillip James Financial, a financial planning and investment management company in Plymouth, Minnesota. "I am used to working long hours at my previous jobs, but having recently started my own financial planning practice, I have realized that owning your own business seems like a 24-hour-a-day job." Thus, being flexible means finding the right work environment and schedule to fit one's needs. "If you like your job, try to work with your supervisor. If you are a good employee, they will want to work with you to create a better work-life balance."

For those who are self-employed, Christenson recommends hiring an assistant. "It may mean less profit for you," he says, "but it may be worth it if you are able to spend more time with your [family]. Or schedule in work-from-home days if you really can't take time off." He has learned that priorities shift over time and so should your work-life balance, including social appointments. "I've got to get it [social life] on the calendar," he says. "Anything that is on my calendar gets more attention than an idea floating around in my head."

The challenge of studying for the CFA exam taught Allen Bond, CFA, about the value of "setting realistic expectations for family commitments." In his experience as a business analyst/investment committee member at Jensen Investment Management based in Lake Oswego, Oregon, as well as a member of the board of directors for the CFA Society of Portland, the key for managing priorities is to develop a disciplined plan for priorities "and then stick to the plan."

daily. The different parts of life don't need to be equally distributed; that makes no sense," says Liz O'Donnell, a Boston-area mother of two, the sole breadwinner in her family with a full-time job as a senior vice president at a public relations firm, blogger at www.helloladies.com, and author of the recently published book, *Mogul, Mom & Maid: The Balancing Act of the Modern Woman*. O'Donnell recommends taking a weekly audit and assessing how you are doing before each new week begins, reflecting on what you accomplished, whether you spent the right amount of time with those you wanted to, whether you took time for yourself, and what you want to adjust for the coming week.

O'Donnell recommends setting certain "non-negotiables," such as spending time with family or finding time to write. "Once you are clear on what you want, and what things are non-negotiable, say no to everything else," she

says. “It may be uncomfortable at first, but with some practice, it gets easier.”

“In my experience, the only way to find work–life balance is this: be clear about what you value. Only when you know absolutely what you value can you know what to say yes to and what to say no to,” says Darcy Eikenberg, an executive coach in Atlanta who founded RedCapeRevolution.com.

THE POWER OF ANXIETY

“Remember, anxiety is a good thing and can be a powerful communicator of our values and priorities,” says psychologist Clark. “Define what your perfect work–life balance feels like and what feeling imbalanced feels like. The byproduct for most people feeling balanced is satisfaction and engagement, and imbalance is stress and anxiety. Resist the urge to avoid those feelings.” She suggests probing deeper to identify what area of your life is scaring you or where you feel inadequate or under water and then realizing that this area of your life needs more attention. Ask yourself what you could do differently.

“The bottom line is that the only way to achieve this mythical nirvana of balance is to start by getting crystal clear about the way you want your life to be in every area that is important to you,” says Elene Cafasso, executive coach with Enerpace, Inc. based outside of Chicago.

SETTING GUIDELINES AND BOUNDARIES

Setting guidelines and boundaries for how your personal work–life plan can efficiently function is another key consideration.

KEEP GOING

“What It Takes: Seven Secrets of Success from the World’s Greatest Professional Firms” (a review), *Financial Analysts Journal* (September/October 2013) [www.cfapubs.org]

“Career Conversations: Career Management Fundamentals,” CFA Institute webcast [www.cfawebcasts.org]

Carla Collis Gesite, a life coach in Atlanta, Georgia, related a story of a burned-out client, a woman whose work *was* her life and who came to her for help. “She changed jobs so she would have more time to pursue volunteering and deepen her personal relationships. She also learned to better separate her work life from her personal life by establishing specific boundaries, such as no longer taking on projects when her plate was full, negotiating deadlines, and not checking work e-mails after 7:00 p.m.,” Gesite says. “By putting these guidelines in place, she found she had more time to recharge her batteries and bring fresh energy to her work.”

A physical separation and even a simple change of clothes often helps keep work and life components from blurring. To this end, a daily “transition ritual” is recommended by John Brubaker, a performance consultant in Lewiston, Maine, coach to members of the financial services industry, and author of the book *The Coach Approach: Success Strategies from the Locker Room to the Board Room*.

“Much as Clark Kent gets into the phone booth to mentally and physically change into Superman, so can business professionals change at the end of their day into SuperMom or SuperHusband,” he says. He gives examples of one financial adviser locking her work problems in her office before driving home to be with her family, a financial planner who showers after work and envisions the problems of the day washing down the drain before spending time with his fiancé, and a broker who keeps “work shoes” under his desk in his office and changes into his “dad shoes” (sneakers) at the end of the day when it’s time to play with his

Are Relaxing Vacations a Lost Art?

Vacations are no longer a cure for the stresses of today’s hectic work life, according to data gathered in 2012 by Fierce, Inc., a leadership/training company based in Seattle.

To learn more about the perceived benefits of vacations, Fierce surveyed 1,000 employees across multiple career fields, including finance. Some of the key findings may be surprising:

- 58% of respondents said they receive no stress relief from vacations.
- Only 8.9% of respondents achieve a state of complete relaxation while vacationing.
- 27.3% of employees feel more stressed after vacation.
- 41.6% of workers check in with their office at least every other day while vacationing.
- 6.5% check in with work multiple times per day while on vacation.
- Only 25.8% don’t check in even once.

Fierce feels so strongly that companies need to embrace delegation and other techniques so employees can take stress-relieving, battery-charging vacations that the company itself adopted a new unlimited vacation policy for its employees last year.

“Surprisingly, the only issue we’ve encountered since implementing the new policy is the need to force certain individuals to take some vacation time to recharge their batteries,” Fierce CEO Halley Block tells *CFA Magazine*. “An unlimited-paid-time-off policy may not work for every organization, but it can work for any firm as long as communication is center to the culture and teams and individuals are engaged and committed to achieving the larger corporate goals.”

“With mobile technology, people always have to be ‘on’ so many of us have lost the art of how to relax,” says Mary Jane Konstantin, senior vice president at Ceridian LifeWorks in Arlington, Virginia.

kids. “Everyone needs to own their transition ritual, which is different from person to person,” Brubaker adds.

Boundaries are very important to set for yourself and also to let others know about your priorities.

“It is essential that the people you work with know your guidelines and what your rules are,” says Carrie-Anne McGrath, a Waltham, Massachusetts-based manager at recruiting firm Winter Wyman’s accounting and finance search division. Because she works on commission, McGrath says she has sometimes wrestled with the decision of making that extra deal or going to the playground with her children. “I can remember a time when one of my sons was screaming at me on the playground to put my phone down and come play. That really resonated with me. I can still hear his voice. I try to remember that when I am overstepping my own boundaries!”

Part of the process is making sure priorities are communicated to family members “so everyone knows that when

you are not able to make an event or be home [because] you have already talked about it,” says Jane Mattson, senior vice president at career management company Keystone Associates in Southborough, Massachusetts.

Even when firm guidelines are set, remember that changing life events can and will present themselves and will necessitate adjustments, if only for a little while.

“There are seasons in your life when you must have a specific and immediate focus on something important to you—an ailing parent, a pregnancy, or starting your own business,” says Haseltine. “This becomes your priority for a season of your life. You may not know the end date of this priority, but you know that it is just for a season.”

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HAS THE HIGHER EDUCATION MARKET EARNED A FAILING GRADE?

By John Rubino

The year 2013 will go down as the year that US higher education became a true market, with transparent pricing, discerning consumers, a shakeout that eliminated or transformed weaker players, and (for the first time) a noticeable impact on the broader economy and financial markets.

When a *CFA Institute Magazine* article looked into the possibility of a higher education bubble in 2011, some experts saw a potential systemic financial threat (“The World’s Best-Educated Bubble,” November/December 2011). Since then, the underlying numbers have grown even uglier.

The so-called higher education bubble may be near collapse, with private banks exiting the market.

Changes in the higher education market likely will lead to structural changes as well as “creative destruction.”

Student loan indebtedness may have systemic implications for investors, economic growth, and fiscal/monetary policy.

- Total student loan debt in the United States increased US\$200 million, to about US\$1.2 trillion. Two-thirds of students graduating from US colleges and universities now carry at least some debt, with the average borrower US\$26,600 in the red, and 1 in 10 graduates owing more than US\$40,000.
- The reported student loan default rate ticked up to 13%, but this grossly understates the level of distress experienced by former students. According to the Consumer Financial

Protection Bureau, when all the borrowers taking advantage of various government forbearance programs are counted, the portion not making payments rises to nearly 28%.

- College tuition and room and board continue to outpace inflation. According to a College Board survey, tuition at community colleges and four-year schools is up about 6% and 5%, respectively, in the current academic year. Room and board exceeds tuition in many cases and is up an average of 4%. Textbook prices, meanwhile, have more than doubled since 2001, while the price of recreational books declined 1.5%.
- Private banks are exiting the student loan market. In 2010, the US Department of Education took over writing federally insured student loans, leaving only the private loan market—in which parents whose kids have maxed out their federally guaranteed borrowing capacity take out additional, non-federally guaranteed debt—for commercial banks. Because outstanding private student loans now total less than US\$200 billion, the banks are losing interest. JP Morgan Chase, for instance, withdrew from this niche in 2013, a tacit recognition that the private student market is now too small to be worth a mega-bank’s attention.
- State spending on higher education continues to decline. Eleven states have cut funding by more than one-third per student since 2008, and two states—Arizona and New Hampshire—are down by half. Nationwide, public universities rely on state and local funding for less than 57% of their revenues today, down from 70% in 2000.