



# Is work life balance a myth?

Or does everyone else know something you don't? By Jackie Sloane

**F**red Cook, CEO of the international communications consulting firm Golin Harris, says he never uses an email autoresponder when he is out of the office. Imagining how many emails he must get, I asked him why.

"I don't want my people or clients to think I am not available. Because I always am." When it comes to work-life balance strategies, Cook believes that "when you are just starting out, the balance is more on work. As your career progresses, work and life seem to merge indistinguishably. I work at mixing personal and business. For example, I take my family with me on business trips, then tack a few days on with them."

"I believe that work-life balance is hard but not a myth," says Kim Feil, executive vice president and chief marketing and strategy officer for OfficeMax.

"In the end, only each of us can take charge of our time, our boundaries and our personal/professional priorities. When we accept a senior-level role, we are accepting a certain type of personal time encroachment, but then we also have to be clear about what we consider absolutely sacrosanct. I am not the best role model; I truly enjoy my work and often reflect that there are periods of time where it becomes too all-encompassing."


There's a school of thought that holds there is no such thing as true work-life balance, that **the real question is: What do we need to do to maintain personal energy and a sense of personal freedom?**

What matters most to you? What are you working to accomplish? What practices and structure do you need in place to support satisfaction and progress?

**Review your values.** If you're feeling empty, or like you're missing out on something, reflect on what it is you value. Professional accomplishment? Family? List your values. Which aren't getting enough attention? What steps can you take to satisfy your need in that area? For example, if adventure is one of your values, you might schedule a weekend trip or take a tango class. **Being in touch with your values helps you make sound judgment calls.** Their order of importance can change over time.

**Create an extreme self-care list.** If you were taking extremely good care of yourself, what would you be doing on a regular basis? What would be happening? List and review regularly. One client realized she wasn't scheduling enough regular fun and began taking horseback-riding lessons, which ultimately became a deeply satisfying activity she shared with family members.

**Articulate your vision.** What's your vision? What life do you ultimately seek to create? A clear vision is a powerful focusing tool. Set aside 20 minutes, take some deep breaths and, with the power of your imagination, see yourself in the future, experiencing deep satisfaction with your life. What have you accomplished? What's happening? Note as much detail as possible. Given your vision, what new actions do you need to take? What do you need to stop doing?

As Feil notes, it's up to each of us to make the choices that produce meaning in our lives. Are you living the life you want? 

JACKIE SLOANE has been coaching executives for nearly 20 years. She has collaborated with leaders at privately held, public sector and Fortune 300 organizations to achieve significant business and personal results and to create profound change.