

Boardrooms, Babies and Balance

6 observations through juggling career and family

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As a full-time employee I'd always assumed that those working part-time had it made. With half the week in the office, and the other half at home with the family, it sounded ideal. But since returning from a year of maternity leave, doing my job on a part-time basis has revealed many new challenges.

Balancing the competing demands of career and family is an ongoing battle, so here are **6 observations that have helped me along the journey**.

1. Be precise with defining success

Flexible working arrangements (like working from home, or time-shifted effort) are wonderful freedoms afforded by the modern workplace. But in order to be successful, we need to have clearer goals.

Management strategies like Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE)¹ encourage managers to focus on the outcomes required, rather than the hours worked. This type of leadership gives employees the freedom to succeed, improves productivity, and drives longer-term engagement.

Whilst strategies like ROWE might require organisational transformation, most of us can still improve the clarity of our goals so that we can deliver results, wherever we're working from.

2. Good enough is almost always good enough

In the dynamic work environment, it's safe to assume perfection is an illusion.

I've lost days *perfecting* a piece of work, or poring over a presentation. But more recently I've discovered that this rarely adds any discernable benefit. Instead I'm trying to follow the advice of psychologist Barry Schwarz: "when it comes to happiness and satisfaction, 'good enough' isn't just good — it's perfect."²

3. The art of saying no

Pleasing people by always saying "yes" is easy. But from my experience, the key to maintaining your work-life balance is much more difficult because it involves learning when to say, *"no, thank-you"*.

The courage to do so comes from recognising that there is a limit to what can be done in a day. Saying "let me get back to you", or "not right now", is the only way to make room for what's important and avoid unnecessary stress.

4. The stigma of working part-time

In some workplaces there can be a perception that part-time workers are less committed. This can mean that when development opportunities or promotions arise, part-timers may be overlooked. Whilst it's not always practical to take on these opportunities, showing genuine enthusiasm will hold you in good stead for the future. Proactively demonstrating your interest is often the best way to promote what you are capable of - and no-one is going to do that for you!

5. Flexibility requires give and take

Don't forget that your employer values you and is supporting your need for flexibility. This also means there will be times you need give back too.

Common opportunities to show you're flexible include:

- Traveling to meet with a client which means you'll be away from the family
- Taking an opportunity to present to your team on a day you don't usually work

By showing flexibility, you demonstrate commitment to achieving the organisation's goals and objectives.

6. Everyone needs some support

Many have heard the ancient proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child".

An advantage with today's flexible workforce is that there are more people with similar challenges, and they are often willing to help.

No-one expects you to be a super-human. Always ask for help, and when it is offered, don't be too proud to take it. Workplace support and childcare options are a great start, but I've also found that new networks can be built through relationships with friends, colleagues, and local groups.

These days I think we should adapt the proverb, because it actually takes an entire community to raise a child **AND** continue developing your career!

References

¹ ROWE is a management strategy co-created by Jody Thompson and Cali Ressler who have a consulting group CultureRx

² Olga Khazan, *The Power of 'Good Enough'*, Published in The Atlantic, March 2015