



Work vs. Life

Eight hours a day (if you're lucky); five days a week (if you're lucky); with 8 Bank Holidays and 4 weeks' annual leave that's 233 working days a year. Assuming a 40-year career that's around 9,000 days or 30% of your lifetime – more or less. More importantly those 40 years are the ones when you marry, bring up a family and do most of the quality 'living' of your life. So perhaps we should focus on that period: 9,000 days actually represents 62% of your time during that window.

Let's analyse the 'family' time: in the 40-year window you may have approximately 5,500 days free. If you're lucky enough to get 8 hours' sleep on average, then of these days the equivalent of around 1,700 days are spent asleep. So that leaves you 3,800 days or 10.4 years to spend time with friends and family – 10/40 or 25% of your available time – focusses the mind doesn't it!

Before I put the calculator away let's have some fun. If you make a few assumptions and ask some questions about the quality of your working day you find that over your entire career you might spend:

- 750 days commuting (based on a 1-hour commute)
- 375 days having lunch (assuming 1 hour a day)
- 375 days chatting to colleagues on non-work issues (this is possibly conservative)
- 375 days struggling with IT problems (again, probably an under estimate)

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There are a number of serious points to make here of course around work-life balance, around flexible working and around extracting the maximum benefit from your working day.

Work-life balance

Do you live to work or work to live? In the end it doesn't matter, if you have a family you have an obligation to dedicate a significant proportion of your time to those people and probably more to the point, to make that time of a high 'quality'. We need to learn to put down the phone and pay full attention to those around us. It is truly hard to switch off at the end of a working day but it is something that we all must continually strive to get better at not only for the sake of our family but also, frankly for our own well-being. The stress of day-to-day life actually is manifest in your face because your facial muscles tense as a consequence. Sleep deprivation, from most nights at less than the full eight hours also contributes to your 'look'. If you have ever taken a two week, get-away-from-it-all holiday where you were able to truly forget your work you will have noticed the relaxation return to your face and the bags disappear from under your eyes. You had reached a rare state of relaxation and – in my experience – find that you are able to sleep/nap at any time of the day.



Regular exercise is very useful in the search for the correct balance and has been proven to help in the tolerance of stress. In the final analysis, the quality of your work will almost certainly improve if you strike the correct balance so look at it in that way if it helps combat any sense of guilt that you may develop.

Flexible working

I don't know about you but spending 750 days on a train during my career is not desirable – whether the Wi-Fi works properly or not.....It hurts the work-life balance and all for little because the quality of work achieved (if any) in that period is never as good as the office.

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That much is true – the question is does it matter where that office is? Flexible working is an issue that will have to be taken more and more seriously over the next couple of decades. Many factors contribute to this debate from cost of housing forcing people to live further from city centres; population density causing an ever-worsening commuting experience; the need to offer family friendly conditions to cater for child care; and the 24/7 business world we now live in that doesn't respect time zones or national holidays. Frankly it is a no brainer, so long as broadband is in place you can operate as well as in the office and with coded intranet access you can access files and databases as if you were there. In fact, for some jobs it can be a better environment with fewer distractions. Companies will eventually have to get on-board and will then begin to reap the benefits via improved productivity and staff-retention.

Maximising your working day

Most reasonable bosses will agree that they are in search of maximum efficiency of work as opposed to hours put in – productivity is of course a current concern in the UK. In other words, an employee should be judged on the amount of successfully completed work against targets rather than overtime hours put in. Indeed, flexibility of hours could and should be offered where people are successfully ahead of targets – clocking in and clocking out means nothing if the person is not fully engaged while they are at work, stimulated and energised to perform at his or her maximum potential.

It is clear to me that an environment of flexible working will help to achieve this drive as well as to better balance work and home responsibilities for all involved – a win: win!

Written by A. J. Low of Discussing Business Ltd, May 2016.

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