

Putting on the Brakes

The term ‘work-life balance’ stresses me out. It brings to mind an image of the Scales of Justice. On one side I’m supposed to stack all my work activities and on the other all my life activities, then stand back to be judged on how evenly the scales balance.

I often hear this kind of self-judgment from conversations. People start to panic because they’ve swung too far to the work side, so they slam on the brakes, head off on vacation and immediately come down with the flu. Right idea – just not the graceful outcome they intended.

Which reminds me of a story. When my daughter hit the six-month mark last summer I decided to reclaim some time for myself. I polished off my red bike, donned my helmet and escaped to the trails behind my house just as the sun edged over the horizon. I was completely caught up in the freedom of zipping along the dirt trails, flying down the hills and coasting among the trees. That is until I came to a sharp bend. I panicked. At the speed I was going I was either going to have to make some sort of pro-biker maneuver or head straight into the forest. So I slammed on the brakes. Well, apparently the right-hand brake is for the back wheel and the left-hand brake is for the front wheel and if you press the front brake first, the bike will throw you like a wild horse.

It can feel that way with this work-life balance stuff. We want to get it right. We take some steps to get there, but deadlines still loom or the kids get sick and our best laid plans are thrown, leaving us feeling guilty or disappointed.

I am therefore going to propose another way of thinking. I propose we start thinking more about the enjoyment of a particular activity rather than whether or not the scales are tipped one way or the other. Because if it’s our intention to enjoy what we are presently doing, then it will become clear fairly quickly if we are out of balance. And from that point we can then determine what we need to do to get back on track.

I like to think of it as the enjoyment factor. Am I enjoying the work I’m doing today? Do I need to take a break and go for a walk? Am I enjoying this walk or would I feel better if I cut it short and finished that column I was working on? To me, the word enjoyment works as a true guidepost toward making decisions that lead to greater work-life fulfillment.

How do you remember to check in with your enjoyment factor? Think about a symbol or image that represents enjoyment for you and place it in your office. It could be a photo of a family vacation, a meaningful quote, or a basketball hoop hung behind your door. Something that will remind you to press pause long enough to check in with yourself and determine what you need to do in that moment to get closer to your ideal work-life experience.


Because here’s the thing - if we’re not *enjoying* what we’re doing, no matter what it is, then we *are* out of balance. And we’ll have a much harder time staying on the bike.



Karen Kelloway

Enjoyment-based decisions are the real key to achieving work-life balance.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you enjoy about the work you are doing?
2. When are you at your best? What are you doing?
3. Think about the tasks or activities you are involved in right now. Which ones are fueling your energy and which ones are depleting your supply?
4. How can you gracefully let go of the energy zappers in the pile?
5. What are the top five ways you like to recharge?
6. What symbol can you place in your work space to remind you to check in with your enjoyment factor?
7. What small thing can you do right now to move you toward greater fulfillment in your working life? 

Based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Karen Kelloway is a certified executive coach trained through Royal Roads University. Karen works with motivated, dedicated professionals to take their performance at work to breakthrough levels. Through her business columns, tele-classes, individual and group coaching, Karen provides the tools and know-how to get the results you desire. Visit kellowaycoaching.com, email karen@kellowaycoaching.com or call 902-444-3985. The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of *Atlantic Business Magazine*.