

Managing the Elusive Work Life Balance

A Summit Session Recap

Does it feel like you're being pulled in too many directions with work and home life competing for attention? While the struggle to find enough hours in the day isn't a new challenge, and we all learned a thing or two about self-care in 2020, the changing advancement landscape makes revisiting time management and wellness topical. Many of us also face planning and prioritization challenges that come with aging parents, personal health, pregnancy, and parenthood.

In the recent Summit session, "Lean In, Take the Wheel, Work Life Balance, 25 Hours in a Day," panelists Sarah Thomas, Anida Ho, and Michael Halverson shared their experiences and tips for balancing life as parents and caregivers while building successful careers in advancement. Learn more about their strategies below.

Time Management

To better manage time, take a broader view than focusing solely on daily or 8 hr increments, knowing that some days will be more focused on work, others on family, and across a week or month you can find time to prioritize both. Schedule family time with the same rigor you schedule work meetings, and create consistent routines your family can count on.

Know which balls are rubber and which are glass (know what you can drop). Use that knowledge to make time to exist as a human outside of work, such as through personal hobbies or going to the gym. These activities are especially important because not taking care of yourself and your wellness can backfire. One of the panelists slipped a disc after skipping their gym routine and was unable to walk for 3 weeks, adding to time management burdens.

Setting Boundaries and Communicating Needs

It's best to keep the lines of communication open with your supervisor. If taking an evening call means not being able to see your child for the day, share those experiences. Be upfront and transparent about challenges and what you can do, keeping it solution oriented, e.g. "I can't do X, but I can do Y." For accommodations, go through HR and get them in writing.

Delegate and negotiate deadlines as applicable. Know your limits, and step back from volunteer work and other optional activities if they are no longer the priority. Prioritization is more effective than multitasking, as the latter can fuel additional stress.

Either set the phone down, or leverage it to set focus hours.

Finding Help

Communication is key in finding help too. Regularly check-in with your spouse or partner. Not doing so can lead to arguments about whose meeting is more important. Also build a wider support network of family, friends, and neighbors so that you aren't reliant on any one person. Along the way, take actions

that support others. By being someone else's community, you'll feel more comfortable asking for help when you need it.

Paying for help is also an option. Hiring a cleaning service or using a grocery delivery company like Instacart can free up time for more treasured activities during busy periods of your life.

Consider talking with peers at your organization. Many may be facing similar challenges.

Finally, ask yourself, "What would I tell someone else to do?" and listen to your own good advice.

Making Positive Career Decisions

Take a holistic view when considering promotions and other career moves. A high salary and title may not be worth an increased cost of living, loss of hybrid/remote work options, or demands on time. If you're a parent, consider the availability of day care in the new city. Know the non starters for your family and ask whether you would be better or worse off as a family. Starting a new job also often comes with an extra investment of time and energy to ramp up and acclimate to new colleagues, processes, and workplace culture.

Remember that career growth doesn't have to be linear. It's okay to have career plateaus that support your family goals, and you can continue professional development and skill building even while remaining at the same professional level. That way when you have more availability you'll be prepared for future opportunities. Get started by picking 2-3 things to be really good at and focus on them. Ask your boss to help you identify a mentor who's managing similar family priorities successfully.

Leading by Example

If you are a manager, model a healthy work life balance for your team, while proactively helping them learn about employee wellness benefits. Communicate that accommodations are a flexible benefit when meeting the expectations of the role.

If questions of fairness arise, remember there are limits to what you can share about another individual's circumstances. Ask the concerned employee why the situation is important to them and how you can support their unique needs, adding that they would have access to similar flexibility in the future if they needed it and met the policy. Some communications are best at the team level, so everyone receives the same information about available resources.

On the topic of multitasking, a session attendee also noted that If you, as a manager, expect the undivided attention of your employees in meetings, make sure to reciprocate and not multitask when they need your attention.

Through these many great pointers, we can adopt positive practices that help us (and our team members) enjoy multifaceted lives without feeling so overwhelmed. Think about one change you can

make today to improve your own wellness and build a more fulfilling harmony between work and home life. With creativity, there is room for both to be meaningful.



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