WORK/LIFE BALANCE: SURVIVAL OR CAREER SUICIDE

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Work/Life Balance: Survival or Career Suicide?

July 11, 2014 | 1:00 PM Eastern

Faculty Bios

Deborah Epstein Henry is an internationally recognized expert on the retention and promotion of lawyers and work/life balance. She is the author of LAW & REORDER, the #1 best-selling ABA Flagship Publishing Book for 2011. A former litigator, Debbie is President of Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, providing advisory and speaking services for legal workplaces. She received a B.A. in psychology from Yale and a J.D. cum laude from Brooklyn Law School.

Dr. Larry Richard is a recognized expert on the psychology of lawyer behavior. Formerly a partner with Altman Weil and chair of the Leadership and Organization Development practice at Hildebrandt International, he launched LawyerBrain LLC in 2011 to focus on improving lawyer performance through personality science. A graduate of Penn Law School, Larry practiced law for ten years before earning a Ph.D. in psychology from Temple University.
Moderator Bio

Kathy Morris founded Under Advisement, Ltd. in 1988 to help lawyers excel in their careers. She was a criminal defense lawyer before starting her work in lawyer professional development and training. She also was the original creator of the ABA Career Center.

Kathy earned her JD from Northeastern University School of Law in Boston and her BA from Michigan.

She is the series moderator for the monthly ABA Free Career Advice Series programs.

Program Agenda

- Top Issues
- Tips on the Topic
- Participant Questions
- Agree/Disagree
- More Participant Questions
- Takeaways
- ABA Resources
Top Issues

• The definition and trade-offs of work/life balance.

• Factors that contribute to balance or lead to burnout.

• Ways to build resilience and enjoy both work and life.

Tips on the Topic

• Social connection is critical to obtaining life and work satisfaction.

• If you don’t have a regular mindfulness practice, begin one today.

• Be deliberately strategic within your workplace about your own strengths.

• Eliminate potential colleague resentment regarding your work/life choices.
Multitasking is a key skill for maintaining work/life balance...so you can do more and get out of the office sooner.
Agree/Disagree

Striving for work/life balance is survival, not career suicide.

More Participant Questions?
Takeaway

- Learn the science behind lawyer satisfaction and well-being.

Takeaways

- Learn the science behind lawyer satisfaction and well-being.

- Replace your pessimistic thoughts.
Takeaways

• Learn the science behind lawyer satisfaction and well-being.

• Replace your pessimistic thoughts.

• Stop being your own enemy.

Final Takeaway

• Learn the science behind lawyer satisfaction and well-being.

• Replace your pessimistic thoughts.

• Stop being your own enemy.

• Recycle: repurpose your efforts.
Visit the ABA Career Center Website to:

- **Search and apply** for more than 450 high-quality legal jobs nationwide
- **Upload your resume** for review by hundreds of potential employers
- **Receive email alerts** when new jobs are posted that meet your search criteria
- **Or post a job** if you have an open position to fill

www.ambar.org/careers
The Next Free Career Advice Series Program:
Live from the ABA Annual Meeting
Top Issues to Master for a Thriving Career
August 8, 2014
10:30 – 11:30 AM ET
Sheraton Hotel – Boston
Liberty Ballroom B, 2nd Floor
Free to Annual Meeting Attendees
Co-sponsored by the Young Lawyers Division

Our ABA Free Career Advice Series Resumes its Regular Time and Format on
September 12, 2014

www.ambar.org/advice
Work/life balance is an issue facing all lawyers during the span of their careers.

Many law students and lawyers make the mistake of thinking that work/life balance is an entitlement mostly sought by women when they have kids. In turn, many employers misperceive work/life balance as a temporary accommodation for working moms. These assumptions are incorrect. As I wish I had known in law school, the only way for work/life balance to work is if it is designed to be a win-win solution for both lawyers and employers during a lawyer’s full career lifespan.

So, how does that work? For starters, you have to be indispensable. The more valuable you are to your employer, the more negotiating power you will have in proposing to work differently. If your work quality is top notch, an employer will be more receptive to developing a creative solution to recruit and/or retain you.

However, the onus is on you to demonstrate how it is economically in your employer’s interest to hire or retain you when you are proposing to work less traditionally. You will also need to show that work quality will not be negatively impacted by your work/life balance priorities. This may be a difficult proposal to make at the outset of your career. So, be patient. It may not be fitting for you to always have your work/life requests met, particularly when you are entering the profession.

When seeking work/life balance, you want to make sure you are realistic. For example, if you set your expectations for flexibility rather than predictability, you will be more satisfied with your arrangement while meeting the demands of a thriving legal practice. Part of being flexible is being responsive and accessible to clients’ and colleagues’ needs and ensuring that work continues to flow when you are outside the office.

What’s also important is for you and your employer to recognize that work/life balance is not just about “part-time” for working moms. Work/life balance is an issue facing all lawyers during the span of their careers. This broader notion of work/life balance includes: ensuring reasonable hours for all lawyers; protecting lawyers’ vacations; supporting parental and other leaves; providing child care and elder care support; offering flexible and reduced hours; implementing successful reentry policies for lawyers getting back to work; and developing phased retirement programs.

As you enter the profession and aspire for an integrated and balanced life as a lawyer, keep these thoughts in mind to ensure that you always deliver high-quality work and service to your colleagues and clients while seeking fulfillment in your life inside and outside the office.
Three Keys to Selling and Achieving Work/Life Balance in Today’s Legal Market

By Deborah Epstein Henry

Most lawyers fear that employers will look askance if they raise work/life balance needs in today’s legal market. Lawyers worry that work/life balance is now seen as a luxury—they should feel lucky to have a job. Here are three tips to maximize the likelihood of your work/life needs being met, especially in today’s challenging economic climate.

First, use flexibility as an asset to meet the business demands of your employer. Many employers are uncertain of their staffing needs and don’t want to pay for lawyers’ time if the work is no longer there. Show your willingness to flex your work, hours and pay with the demands of the practice. Demonstrate how it is economically in your employer’s interest to hire or retain you at flexible or reduced hours.

Second, take gender out of the discussion. Work/life arrangements are often seen as a “mommy” issue. However, increasingly men and women are expressing work/life needs for different reasons at all stages of their career. When you propose a work/life arrangement, the basis for your request should be irrelevant. Do not approach the request as an accommodation. Instead, explain how you will meet the demands of practice on flexible or reduced hours while not negatively impacting colleagues or clients.

Third, be indispensable, responsive and accessible. The greater your employer perceives your value and importance, the more negotiating power you will have. If your work quality is top notch, an employer will be more receptive to developing a creative solution to recruit or retain you at flexible or reduced hours. Also, be responsive and accessible when you are out of the office to meet the needs of clients and colleagues. In turn, if you set your expectations for flexibility rather than predictability, you will be more satisfied with your arrangement while meeting the demands of a thriving legal practice.

The Young Attorney Balancing Act: How to Have a Career—and a Life
By Victoria Santoro

March 2013

Work/life balance can be a delicate topic for all young lawyers. Demands on your time come from more experienced and more powerful attorneys, and you will feel pressure to achieve and impress those above you to get ahead. It also has not escaped me that 55 percent of 2011 law graduates were unemployed nine months after graduation. I understand that with the pressure of the job search, and the pressure of a new job, work/life balance might not be the first consideration for many young lawyers. Still, despite wanting to either impress the partners or simply land a job (it will happen), it is important early on to create a lifestyle that you can maintain throughout your legal career. What is work/life balance? Why is it important for young attorneys? And how do you achieve work/life balance without inhibiting your success?

What is work/life balance?

Most young lawyers already know that, despite seeking more balance, our personal and professional lives will never be weighted equally. If you do the math, half of your waking hours (or more) are devoted to your career. The other half? That is where you have to cram everything else. As the week stretches out before you on Monday morning and you look at your list of to-do’s, it seems incredibly difficult to carve out some time for yourself.

If you watch gymnasts compete on the balance beam, they are constantly doing what are called “balance checks,” small twitches in the body (leaning over, tilting their arms to one side, moving a foot) that help them regain their balance before continuing on to the next move in their sequence. Without balance checks, gymnasts would fall off the beam, jeopardizing their overall score with a large deduction. But with balance checks, gymnasts are able to stay on track and complete their performance. There is no better metaphor for work/life balance.

Work/life balance is about incorporating these checks into your life, so that you stay on course for achieving your goals (professional and personal), but you don’t fall off of the beam. No one wants to live at the office, but it is all too easy to be consumed by our work. Something else always needs to be done; another project is always waiting. Similarly, it would be completely counterproductive, if you have career goals, to become consumed with your personal pursuits. You will always find classes you’d like to take, trips you would like to go on and people with whom you would like to socialize.

Work/life balance is being able, on certain days, to weight your time more favorably towards your personal life. Work/life balance means taking time for your mental and emotional health, but not losing
sight of what your clients need, and what projects need to be finished. Work/life balance also is highly individualized and means that, whatever your personal life entails, you receive respect from your co-workers for what you choose to do outside of the office. Work/life balance also means having the freedom, once you have earned it, to leave the office early to see your kids, attend a concert or go to a doctor’s appointment. Without each of these four elements: professional achievement; personal enjoyment; respect; and freedom, you will not feel balanced.

**Why is work/life balance so important?**

Before you begin advocating for yourself in attempts to achieve the ideal, but elusive, work/life balance, you need to know why this is something you want. Using some available statistics on employee engagement and productivity, it becomes very clear why balance is something you should be seeking out. No young lawyer wants to sound like they are searching out the ability to “slack,” so I suggest advocating for the three H’s: happy; healthy; and hopeful. These can serve as your guideposts as you search out flex time, telecommuting, and the other things necessary to achieving work/life balance.

Happy, engaged employees are more productive, more creative, more loyal and more efficient. Who doesn’t want to be more productive, creative and efficient? These are all by-products of simply being happy. So give yourself permission to make yourself happy! This phenomenon has been covered by the *New York Times, Forbes, and Business Week*, among countless other blogs and websites. Gallup estimates that disengaged and unhappy employees cost a staggering $300 billion in lost productivity annually in the U.S.

This is too bad, especially considering that employees who have the freedom to make their own schedule and a level of autonomy in how they work feel a profoundly increased sense of ownership over their work product. It is obvious that by creating a lifestyle that brings you happiness, your work product and life satisfaction will flourish.

Similarly, healthier employees, who have time to eat well, exercise and see their doctors, miss less work. What all of this ultimately means is that by making yourself happy and healthy, you are creating the blueprint for terrific long-term work performance. Which brings me to my third “H”: hopeful. Creating a lifestyle that you can maintain long-term dovetails perfectly with the fact that most young lawyers have grand ambitions for the future.

As a young lawyer, learning the details of your practice area and how to generate business will likely open up a world of future opportunities for you to move up from your current position. Addressing your hopes early with your manager will give you insight into future opportunities. Being hopeful for what the future may bring serves as a powerful motivator as a young attorney and will infuse your cases and projects with enthusiasm day in and day out.

In light of this overwhelming evidence in support of work/life balance, it is ever more crucial for you to advocate for yourself as you enter the workforce. Advocating for the three H’s at the beginning of your
career creates a domino effect that will carry you through decades of legal practice. If you remain focused on being happy, healthy and hopeful, you will reap the rewards of excellent and creative work product, client satisfaction, and business generation and will have found joy and contentment in your personal life as well. What could be better?

**How do I achieve work/life balance?**

Achieving work/life balance starts at the very beginning of your career. Advocate for yourself when you begin at your job. You are in the most powerful position as a candidate after you have an offer, but have yet to accept. Most young lawyers would be so overjoyed at a job offer, that they will probably accept it immediately. No one will blame you for jumping at the prospect of full-time employment. So if you are one of the candidates who did this very thing, it’s okay, but early on in your job, talk with your manager to get an idea of your workplace’s culture related to work/life balance.

As a young lawyer, the three most important things to do to set yourself up for a balanced and fulfilling career are:

1. **Set Boundaries**
   Set your boundaries immediately upon beginning work, but also let your co-workers and managers know where you will put in extra time to ensure all deadlines are met. Go above and beyond in as many ways as you can. But, if you devote your Saturdays to watching your daughter play soccer, you should make this clear from the outset. Similarly, if you spend Sunday mornings skiing in New Hampshire, or sailing in Boston harbor, try not to make it a habit to respond to emails, or take meetings on Sundays. Clients and co-workers are generally respectful of weekend time, though.

   Boundaries become yet more important during the week. Try to be as clear and direct as possible about what times you would like to be unavailable. If you spend 6-7 AM training for marathons every day, it is important to let people know and then stick to your schedule. Being allowed this type of freedom creates a deep sense of appreciation in any young lawyer. Be sure to show that appreciation to everyone you work with. Being able to enjoy the balance and boundaries in your life means always putting your best foot forward at the office and continuing to earn these freedoms.

   Again, most clients and co-workers are very supportive of personal endeavors, but you must set clear boundaries and try to not let your personal time be encroached upon by others. This is much harder than it sounds. We are with our smartphones every hour of the day. Many of us even sleep with them. Start small, set your smartphone aside for an hour, and get used to the idea of being disconnected for short periods of time. Eventually, you will feel more comfortable taking the moments you need for activities, doctor’s appointments or family time.

   Finally, striving to make your boundaries consistent goes a long way to creating an environment of understanding and support. If you are consistent in the times you are unavailable, people will eventually understand what you are doing, and will be able to rely on you during other parts of the day. If clients
and co-workers feel that your boundaries are arbitrary, or vary widely for no reason, they will lose their patience with you and become resentful of dealing with your schedule. When setting boundaries, consistency really is key.

2. Communicate
Communication is a very close cousin of setting boundaries. It may feel unnatural to share your personal pursuits so freely, but it will surprise you how much support you can create simply by being honest about what you do with your personal time. Many people enjoy supporting their co-workers in their personal endeavors and some will even choose to support you outside of the office. The atmosphere of support, though, will be completely stifled if you are unable, or uncomfortable, communicating your needs and goals to your managers, and your co-workers.

Strive to be clear and direct, and communicate, to the extent necessary, how important it is that you are able to pursue one or two personal goals outside of the office. If you are learning to cook, and will need to leave by 4:30 PM one day a week for two months, be honest about this other commitment. If necessary, offer up alternative hours or solutions to any potential conflicts at the office. Being upfront and creative about solving any potential problems will only make you appear more professional. Under no circumstances should a young attorney simply leave the office and hope no one notices that you are suddenly unavailable. Acting as if your personal life is a secret will make it feel secretive, as if it’s something to feel guilty about. Refer back to the three H’s from above, and how important it is to feel healthy, happy and hopeful in your whole life, not just at the office.

3. Organize
Organizing your work life and personal life will certainly take the most effort, but the rewards will be large if you take the time to plan. Each week, make sure you have a clear understanding of what obligations you will need to meet at work and outside of the office. Make a note in your calendar, and let your boss and your secretary know if any of your personal pursuits will interfere with work hours. This way, if you will be absent Thursday starting at 4 PM, you can be sure to put in extra time on Tuesday and Wednesday and have a clear idea of what tasks need to be completed by Thursday afternoon.

This is the essence of finding balance in work and in life, and performing those “balance checks” that were referenced above. Certain days can sometimes be weighted slightly towards other pursuits, and so long as you are able to plan for these events, you will be more able to complete your professional responsibilities. Without a clear plan, and an understanding of the plan by your professional team, support staff, managers and your loved ones, your schedule will almost certainly fall of track.
Conclusion

Sometimes, work will simply override all other aspects of your life (maybe even for weeks), and work/life balance is completely impossible. The suggestions provided here are guidelines for a general path through your career. Always keep in mind that careers, last for decades, and ups and downs are inevitable. Sometimes you will feel extremely balanced, and others you will not. Michael Bogdanow, managing partner at Meehan, Boyle, Black & Bogdanow, P.C., has spoken numerous times on work/life balance. He explains that the most important factor in achieving balance in your life is finding your true passions. He says, “You have to care so much that the real question isn’t ‘how can I balance these interests’ but is ‘how could I not?’”

In truth, work/life balance is about transparency. Setting boundaries, communicating your needs, and creating an organizational plan all comes down to the fact that our work lives and our personal lives are becoming more and more reconciled. Historically, we have been capable of living in a completely compartmentalized state, but it is no longer necessary, or even possible. Smartphones have made compartmentalization altogether impossible. Today’s offices are evolving rapidly, and it is appropriate for the legal profession to keep pace. With the appropriate knowledge, focus and effort, you will be able to reconcile your professional achievement with your personal enjoyment and find a workplace that provides you both the respect and the freedom to fully develop, as a young attorney and as a person.

Victoria Santoro is an associate at Meehan, Boyle, Black & Bogdanow, P.C. in Boston.