

The *Harmony* of Blending

Those struggling with work-life balance may be better off blending the two—a mindset that is growing more popular with working professionals.

Amy Vetter runs and operates her own yoga studio, plays music and is the mother of two teenage boys. At the same time, she's a corporate technology executive who frequently travels and works remotely from another state. She's able to do all this because of work-life blending.

BY JASON HENSEL

"I often blend work and life by calling into conference calls and responding to emails from my home office or car while taking my children



to their games or lessons," Vetter says. "I often work off hours in the evenings when needed to be able to collaborate with people in different time zones or complete deadlines. I create flexibility in how I schedule my day in order to accomplish my work and family commitments, but also create space for my personal hobbies so I can be the best person I can be at work and at home."

Vetter's blending of work and personal life isn't unique. Technological advances have helped create more opportunities for remote employees, as well as an always-on, 24-hour culture. Despite the negatives, being available is a good thing for working professionals with children.

"For my family, blending became a necessity when I started traveling with my professional speaking business," says Bobbe White, a speaker and owner of Try Laughter! Inc. "To blend from afar meant to incorporate phones, videos, FaceTime, Facebook, Skype and any technology that pulls us together."

What is Work-Life Blending?

The phrase "work-life balance" is popular, but blending is becoming the new norm.

"Expecting to turn off your phone at 5 p.m. is an antiquated view of work," Lindsey Pollack wrote in her blog post, "What Does Work-Life Balance Mean in 2016?" "Now, everyone—and Millennials in particular—realize it's not realistic in most professional careers to expect work will be complete at 5 p.m. (or 6 p.m., or 7 p.m.)."

Vetter likes to describe work-life blending as "work-life harmony."

"It ebbs and flows with the rhythm of your life, rather than being too structured," says Vetter, author of *Business, Balance & Bliss: How the B3 Method Can Transform Your Career and Life*. "For example, there are some weeks when I devote the right amount of time to my family and personal hobbies as I do to work, and there are other weeks when I spend more time on work when deadlines are impending."

Blending has certainly changed how work gets accomplished over the last decade.

"When I first started my career, if I

friend's wedding or hit the gym when we need to or rest when we are sick," Pollack wrote. "As one young professional said to me recently: 'I don't like the term 'work-life balance.' Isn't it all just life?'"

Vetter says that balancing is stressful.

"It means that you strive to always spend a scheduled amount of time with your family, personal hobbies and work," she says. "But this just isn't always realistic, nor should it feel forced or stressful. Work-life blending is much more feasible and means that you engage in work and life at the rhythm that makes the most

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wanted to work on the weekend, I had to trudge into the office to have access to my documents," wrote Pollack, an author, speaker and Millennial workplace expert. "One attorney recently told me she remembers weekends early in her career of faxing several-hundred-page contracts and having to watch each page to make sure it didn't get stuck in the fax machine. Now? She attaches a PDF from her phone wherever she happens to be."

Why Blend Instead of Balance?

Work-life balance, Pollack suggests, is complicated because of several factors, such as family commitments, business goals and personal well being.

"In my opinion, we should all have the flexibility to be the best man in our

sense for you at any given time."

Younger professionals have embraced blending too, unlike generations before them.

"They will spend a few minutes during the work day shopping online or reserving a bike for SoulCycle, but they're also not the least bit bothered by their boss calling them at 8 p.m. or having to answer some emails on a Sunday morning," Pollack wrote.

White found a successful way to blend by bringing one of her children with her when she spoke at events.

"Our son would even sit at my book table and speak to attendees," White says. "On several occasions, we combined my speaking with a family vacation. Those were some of our best efforts



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and memories.”

Not everyone has the means (or desire) to take their children to work with them. Maybe you like keeping work and personal life apart. If so, Vetter suggests setting boundaries.

“I learned this the hard way early on in my life as a business owner,” she says. “I never set boundaries, I never said no. I kind of compare it to gambling. I was never sure if that big payoff, that big opportunity or sale was right around the corner. I was always in the office hoping that the next phone call I answered was the lucky break for my business. So I never said no, and even when I took a vacation, I was accessible to my business and clients. And I burned out.”

But now she’s careful.

“While I do blend my work and life, I make sure to set strategic goals to help me prioritize what’s important, where I should be spending my time and when I need to say no,” Vetter says. “I also treat my personal and family time just as seriously as my work. I schedule it on my calendar, and it’s off limits just like an important meeting. During this time, I don’t take calls or respond to email—I need that time for grounding.”

The tricky part of blending, White says: Most meetings and conferences are scheduled far in advance but school and social activities are more apt to pop up with less notice.

“We’ve succeeded marvelously and we’ve failed horribly—they both come with the territory,” she says. “You try to do the best blending possible. Sometimes you hit, sometimes you miss.”

How to Blend Successfully

To have more hits than misses in blending your work and life, turn to technology.

“I use Slack and instant messaging on my mobile phone, tablet and computer to respond to employees and keep projects on track,” Vetter says. “I also use project management tools like Trello to make sure that project timelines are maintained. This way, not only do my employees and colleagues know what tasks they need to do next, but I can see an overview of the project status at any time. Google Hangouts is invaluable for me to easily plan or jump on a conference call or quickly have some face time with the people I work with.”

Vetter recommends that employers create a culture of blending for employees.

“Adopt the mindset that as long as they get their work done by the deadline, it’s not important that they be physically in the office eight hours a day or have ‘face time,’” she says.

Employees, too, should be flexible in their approach to blending work and life.

“Come up with a plan and schedule for how work-life blending can work for you and benefit the company and sit down with your boss to discuss it,” Vetter says.

“Communication is key to making these working relationships work.”

The important part of blending a busy family into other endeavors is to talk about what’s coming up, White says.

“The more notice, the better, and when priorities collide, you discuss and try to apply a reasonable solution,” she says. “When we love what we do—whatever that is—we will naturally go to extreme efforts to blend work and home life.” ■



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