

WORKING IT OUT

FOREVER TRYING TO FIND THE PERFECT WORK-LIFE BALANCE?
THE NEW THINKING IS TO GIVE UP THE FIGHT AND BLEND THE
TWO, FOR A HAPPIER, MORE FULFILLING FUTURE

Words: **SALLY BROWN**



Accepted wisdom has it that the key to a contented life is finding the perfect work-life balance. But with smartphones and 24-7 connectivity, sticking to strict work-home boundaries gets harder all the time.

So, according to a growing number of experts, the most logical solution to the problem is to give in. Rather than fretting about your work seeping into your home life, let it happen – forget boundaries, and think *blending* home and work life instead.

It's not a case of letting your work take over – it's embracing work-life fusion, says psychologist Professor Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic from University College London, and it will make you happier than chasing that elusive work-life balance. "The more intangible the boundaries between your work and personal life, the more successful you probably are in both. People who work like this don't see their jobs as a nine-to-five endeavour – more a way of spending time with like-minded people doing things that they find fun."

MIND THE GAP

Not only will you be more successful when your personal and professional interests overlap, you'll also feel more fulfilled, believes marketing guru Maneesh Goyal, founder of the Live in the Grey movement (www.liveinthegrey.com), which aims to inspire people to blend personal with professional. So instead of the 'black and white' of 'work and play', you focus on fusing home and work together (to become the slightly unappealingly named 'grey'). "In past decades, people have expected to leave work at 5.30 and almost turn into another person. But what we now want is for work to be an extension of our life, and to reflect what we're passionate about, inspired by or good at. And research shows that in every industry, the people who are the most successful are those who feel the most fulfilled by their work."

It may involve taking a risk and completely changing your career direction. But when your work and personal life begin to fuse, you say goodbye to Sunday night dread and the Monday morning blues, says Maneesh. "When there's no longer a huge gulf between home and work life to be bridged it reduces stress, increases motivation and

productivity and brings a sense of fulfilment that has a positive effect on personal relationships.”

Trying to keep your work life separate from your personal life is often a sign you don't like what you're doing, believes best-selling author and business coach Robert Kelsey. “When people talk about wanting more work-life balance, what they usually mean is reducing the amount of time they spend at work. But if you don't like your job, even if you only spend a third of your week doing it, it's still a third of your life spent doing something you don't enjoy,” he says.

“A big wake-up call for me was ten years ago when I started working with a friend. Whenever I went out and people asked me about it, I couldn't bear to talk about it. But when I finally set up my own business, I was so passionate about it, I couldn't stop talking about it. If you love what you do, it stops being work – it's just part of who you are.”

A key part of the Live in the Grey philosophy is about being authentic, bringing more of your personality into your work life, and making meaningful relationships with the people you work with. “Nothing is more important than your relationships,” says Maneesh. “Collaboration is a key factor in the way business is done these days. And building relationships at work can help you feel inspired by your job – if you're feeling stale, starting a monthly book club with your co-workers could re-engage your enthusiasm for going to the office.”

MIX AND MATCH


Work-life fusion works particularly well with the growing trend for portfolio careers – combining more than one way of earning a living, like Emma Garrett, 45, from Bedford, who set up a community café in her local park that hosts art and cultural events, but also works as a social media consultant. “I didn't set out to work this way – it just evolved when I saw two gaps in the market that I could fill,” she says. “I do some sort of work most evenings and at weekends. But I've met so many interesting and inspiring people and have learned so much both personally and professionally.”

It goes without saying that if your job leaves you feeling uninspired, you'll resent answering emails at 10pm or catching up on paperwork at the weekend. But what if that job is the one that pays the bills? You can still make work-life fusion work for you, says Robert, if you adopt a growth mindset and think of your job as part of your journey, not your destination. “Visualise where you want to be in 10 years' time. Go into detail – where will you live and work, what will your daily routine be? Then work backwards and think, what do I need to have achieved within five years, and within one year? Then focus on the aspects of your current job or your life outside work that take you closer to your dream.”

And the more engaged you are with your work, the less it seems like work; while you may end up working longer hours, it won't feel like it. “Studies on burnout show that it's unrelated to the number of hours worked. It's about engagement – the less engaged you feel with your work, the more at risk you are of burnout,” says Tomas.

POSITIVE THINKING

If you're struggling with long hours, it's good to remind yourself how your job has helped you develop – has it built your self-confidence, stretched your creative thinking, or made you more organised? says Anna Keay, historian, TV presenter and CEO of The Landmark Trust. Keay does some work at home every evening to allow her to leave the office in time for tea and bath time with her five-year-old twins. “It's important to remember why you believe in what you do. Get it into a key sentence or two and even write it down. As a historian, my passion is for old buildings and the pleasure I get from understanding something about the past and sharing it with people.”

Around 40% of the UK workforce will choose to be freelance or self-employed at some point in their career, and many are motivated by seeking work-life fusion, says Tomas. In the future, we'll see more and more big companies waking up to this way of working. “There will come a time when sitting at a desk from nine to five will seem ludicrous.” Is it time for more grey in your life? 

It's in the blend

MAKING WORK-LIFE FUSION WORK FOR YOU

1 Do some jobcrafting – identify which aspect of your work you enjoy the most, and look out for opportunities to do more of it.

2 Find your flow. Not sure what you're passionate about? Think of the last time you were so engaged in a task you lost track of time. How can you bring that into your work?

3 Know where you want to be. “It's OK to start small, but aim to get bigger,” says Maneesh.

4 Be authentic. Lose the ‘work’ persona, and try building real relationships with colleagues.

5 Consider changing your career. “It's risk that makes life remarkable,” says Maneesh.