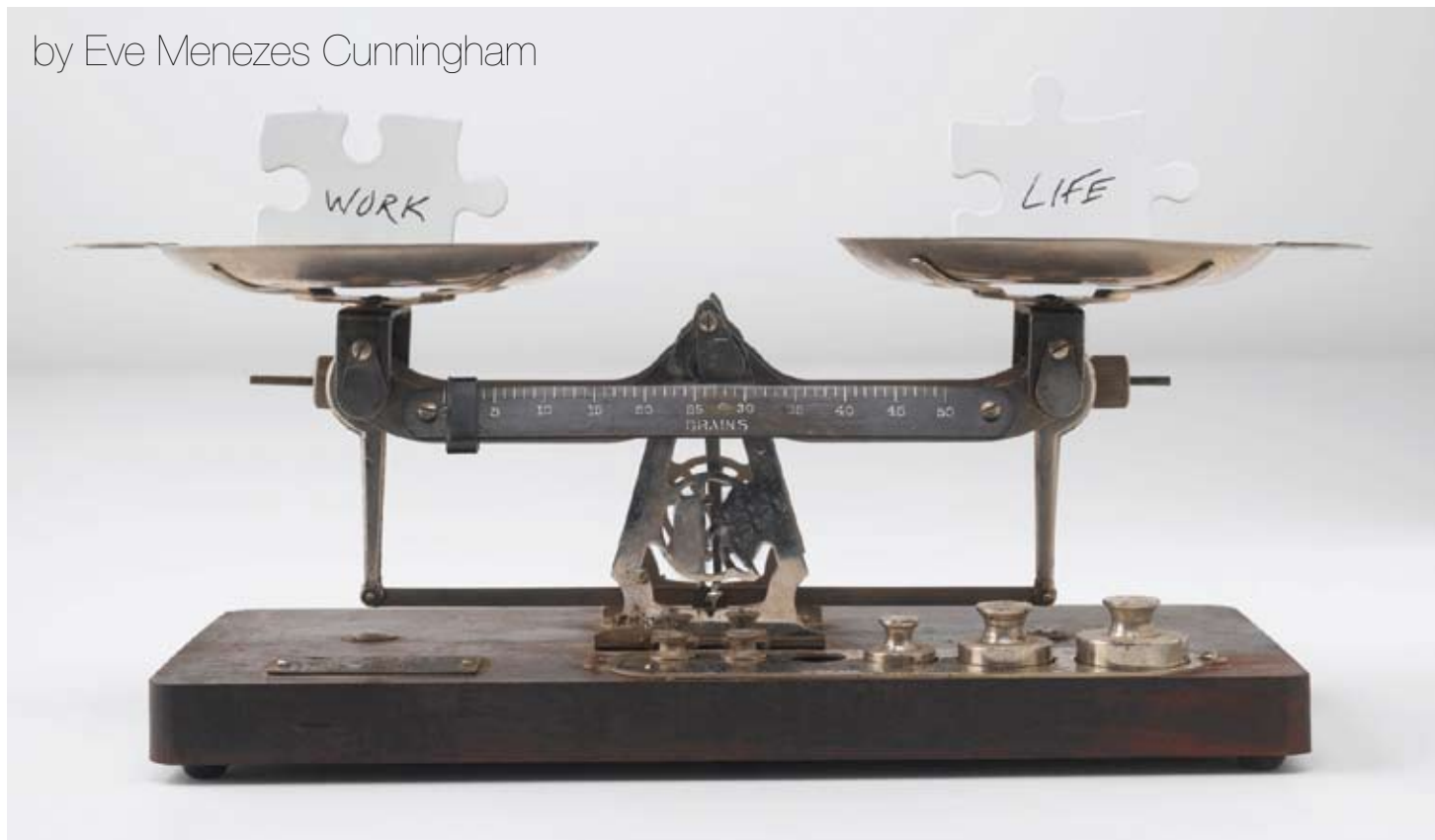


# Do you have a good Work-Life balance?

by Eve Menezes Cunningham



**W**hen you're out of balance, you'll have symptoms but you may not necessarily recognise it as a simple need to tweak things.

This is your life and you are the only one who can decide what's important and what's not.

Work/life

Balance sounds simple but it's an ongoing challenge for most people.

From statistics about people missing work through stress to

mothers alternatively being told they should be working outside the home and then that they shouldn't do anything but be a mum, work/life balance issues regularly make headlines.

Yet the right balance for one woman and her family would be completely wrong for another. Fathers struggle with it, too. Many men put in all the hours available at work to earn as much as

possible to support their families. They then miss out on valuable bonding time as babies grow up and move away. But like mothers, every father needs to make the right choice for him and his family rather than caving in to other people's judgments about what he "should" be doing.

**Do the things that are important today. Tomorrow might be too late and your grandchildren may be grown up and gone**

Even if you don't have a family and children, life can be a huge juggling act. I work from home and balance my coaching and writing work in a way that works really well for me. I usually make time for friends and family as well as regular swimming, yoga, cycling and general life.

But things are never static and one of the

most important things NLP has taught me is the need for flexibility. Take a little time each evening to reflect on the day. What went well? What could you have done differently to help you feel more balanced? By noticing things you can change tomorrow, you'll be constantly bringing more equilibrium into your life.

My current schedule is manic. I had a house fire a few weeks ago and between dealing with all the debris, sorting things out, cleaning them, dealing with the insurance, builders and so on while meeting my deadlines and other work commitments, tonight will be my first evening "off" since it happened.

And part of me feels that I should cancel. That when I finish work, I should go back home (I'm temporarily living across the street) and sort out \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. The other day, I started at 6.30am and didn't stop until after midnight. But I know that this chaos is temporary and that, ultimately, things will be nicer. It's at the stage now where I feel much better about all the progress.

Sue Cotter is the Central Essex Regional Director for the Athena Network. She also runs [www.womensbusinesscoaching.co.uk](http://www.womensbusinesscoaching.co.uk). Sue says, "If someone wants to work 24/7 and doesn't have family and likes doing that, then that's fine. I used to feel guilty for not working. When you're running your own business, you've got so much you want to achieve that it's hard. It's not like shutting an office door at 5pm on a Friday night."

For long term balance, Sue says, "Do the things that are important today. Tomorrow might be too late and your grandchildren may be grown up and gone. Think of the whole jigsaw puzzle of your life."

When you're out of balance, you'll have symptoms but you may not necessarily recognise it as a simple need to tweak things. You may find yourself snapping at people when normally, you couldn't be more gracious. You'll then probably snap at yourself for being so grumpy. But if you can just notice "Oh, I'm feeling especially snappy today, I'll definitely take a lunch break tomorrow...", you'll get yourself back into resourcefulness and balance much more easily.

You'll also probably be noticing strained relationships at home or work or both depending on where the neglect is most apparent. If you don't deal with imbalances early, you'll have to handle more serious consequences like burnout, addictions, ill health. Some people only find balance after illnesses.

With difficult decisions, use your NLP Future Pace the results of the decisions you're struggling with. How will you feel about saying Yes (or No) tomorrow? Next week? Next month? In a year? A decade? This will help you prioritise what's really important.

Life can be incredibly hectic but, if you're doing things – with your family, at home and at work – that energise you, everyone will benefit. Where things are draining, take it as a sign that something needs to give.

Yes, everyone needs to make certain compromises but you have more choices about the way you live your life than you probably realise. Think about the times when time has just flown by because you've been so engrossed in whatever you've been doing (whether that was baking cookies with your children or fishing or an aspect of your job). How can you create more time for this kind of activity?

When was the last time you used the Wheel of Life yourself? Try it now and see what comes up. Rating different areas (fun, career,

wealth, family, spirituality, personal development, love and health) using a scale of one to ten is a great quick way to measure balance overall.

Are you tempted to dismiss certain areas? (Do you think, 'Fun? Work is fun! I don't need more fun!') This is your life and you are the only one who can decide what's important and what's not. If some of the categories feel irrelevant to you, amend it so it reflects the kind of balance you'd like.

Things will depend on the stage of life you're at, too. If you're in a new relationship, the Love area may rank much more highly than the staid job you've been meaning to do something about for years.

And, again, rather than getting tangled up in other people's ideas of work / life definition, think about your own. To help you do this, create an Ideal Schedule and account for every single hour in the week (including weekends, evenings and at night when you're asleep).

How much sleep do you need as a rule? How much time do you want to be spending at home with your family? What does your perfect weekend look like? What kind of work days would eliminate any need for your snooze button?

What do you currently spend most of your time and energy dealing with? Is this a good balance or can you immediately think of an area that needs more attention? When you think about letting this area slide into deeper neglect, does that feel OK or do you realise that you ought to start taking steps now before your work / relationship / health / financial or other situation deteriorates beyond quick repair?

Another tool you can use is the Vision Board. Gather together pictures, photographs and inspirational words that reflect the kind of work life balance you'd like. When you've finished it, put it somewhere to help bring more balance into your life. So if you're currently spending too much time at home and are longing for a career boost, keeping it in the kitchen may be a better reminder than allowing it to gather dust in your home office. Or if you haven't seen your kids for ages, including them in your vision board and hanging it (discreetly if you share the space) at work will help you get home to tuck them into bed. ●



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