

Emma Last

Winter 2022 article

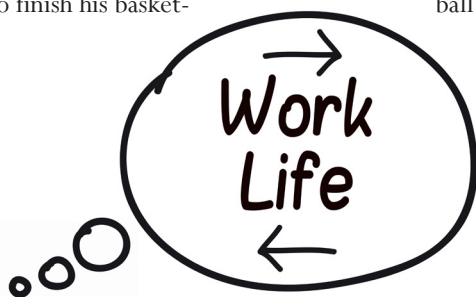


Balancing work and truly living life is easy isn't it? Life is sunshine, happiness, good health, endless pots of money, enough time to spend with those you love, and lots of fun, isn't it? In reality, if your life is anything like mine, It involves huge mounds of washing and frequently replenishing food cupboards. It's not easy filling three growing teens! Standing frozen on the sidelines of football matches, being a taxi service to my children's social and sporting calendars, seriously ill relatives, and snatching time with my husband when we can. And then there's work, deadlines, pressure, change, challenges, and people demanding more for less.

How do we manage our energy and time in our personal and professional lives? Many people talk about work-life balance like it's a set of scales that we can tip more or less one way or the other, with an aim for a person to keep their work and life separate and find some sort of equilibrium. An example might be to have clear boundaries so that you don't do work at the weekends or check your emails on your days off.

However, there are other viewpoints. You may have heard the newer term work-life integration, where there is no distinction between the two, with the aim being that they coexist in harmony, bringing work and life closer together. An example might be you being on a call while putting a wash on or, like me sitting in the car writing this piece while waiting for my son to finish his basket-

ball practice.



Emma Last is a Mental Health Advocate, Strategist, and No. 1 best-selling author on Amazon. She talks openly about her own burnout after a 19-year leadership career. She supports public and private sector organisations and individuals with effective mental health and wellbeing strategies, including training, talks, and coaching. Her mission is to help people to understand both mental health problems and positive mental health so they develop effective life skills. Empowering them to look after themselves and balance their own mental wellbeing, thus preventing them from getting to where she did.

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I used to think life was all about balancing work and life. However, I was navigating so much more. Loana Lupu and Mayra Ruiz. Castro's article 'Work-life balance is a cycle, not an achievement (in 2021 in the Harvard Business Review shares similar thoughts) I would also like to suggest another viewpoint: work-life balance isn't a set of scales; it's more circular. Like the wheel of life (you can find examples of these online), balance is made up of many pieces, such as relationships, physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, finances, work, etc., balance does not always mean all of the parts win to receive the same amount of energy as each other at one time, I know from experience that if we always try to give 100% energy all the time, we can be setting ourselves up to fail, and for many people attempting this leads to burnout.

I love using the analogy of the 'wheel' because sometimes we have to stop it to evaluate if some parts are taking up too much of our energy and time so that it doesn't have a detrimental effect on our overall wellbeing. You may decide that your relationships are not getting the energy they need, or perhaps you are putting far too much energy into one area currently, e.g., work. Making changes to your wheel can be challenging, just like when you are trying to push a flywheel at the fairground; it takes momentum to get it going. Yet sometimes, we have so much momentum that we feel like a hamster on a wheel - going down a path we aren't aware of.

The key to balance is that you are clear on your boundaries and what you want and don't want to integrate. You are in control of the energy and time you are giving to each area of your life, and you evaluate it regularly to check in on the speed of your wheel -or you might just miss out on living life!

