

## ASA Early Career Researcher Mentoring Workshop – Session summary

Session Topic: Work/life balance

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If you only remember three things from this talk, remember these...

1. Don't sweat the small stuff
2. Take control: if you don't design your life someone else will design it for you
3. Don't suffer in silence: seek help when the going gets tough

### Session summary/notes

Topics covered in this session:

- 1 – What does work/life balance mean?
- 2 – What are the essentials of work/life balance?
- 3 – Family planning
- 4 – When and how to seek help

It is a human right (Article 24 of the UDHR) to have time for rest and leisure. Some tips (from Nigel Marsh) to help achieve a good balance are:

- Acknowledge some career choices won't work for you. Some career choices are fundamentally incompatible with being meaningfully engaged with a young family.
- Take control: if you don't design your life someone else will design it for you and you may just not like their idea of balance.
- Be careful with timeframes: you can't do everything in one day. Instead, measure your work/life balance over the week.
- Approach balance in a balanced way: being a fit 10-hr-a-day office rat isn't more balanced, it's more fit. To be balanced we need to attend to all the other parts of our life.

Nigel Marsh has published books on the topic:

- "Fat, 40 & Fired - The year I lost my job & found my life"
- "Overworked & Underlaid - A seriously funny guide to life"

and gave a presentation at TEDxSydney:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdpIKXLLYYM>

Some other points of advice:

- Time is precious, and work stress can impact outside of work hours. Reduce stress by taking control of your work and avoiding long hours. Concepts of time are discussed in the book "Time Bomb – Work, rest and play in Australia today" by Barbara Pocock et al.
- "Perhaps the most basic measure of the potential for happiness lies in having enough time to work, care, rest and play in ways that allow us to enjoy our relationships, good health and a strong social fabric."
- "Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life" – Confucius
- "You've achieved success in your field when you don't know whether what you're doing is work or play" – Warren Beatty
- "Jobs are often a source of feelings of personal achievement, social connection and skill development, alongside the immeasurable rewards of family life. Jobs often provide welcome relief from the demands of caring." – Barbara Pocock

- Don't be ashamed of going home at 5.30pm to have dinner with your family.
- Think holistically: don't plan your career, plan your life.
- Don't think of work and life as being in competition; bring them together as parts of a system – your life. Think about them working together instead of at odds with each other. Find ways to get the personal helping build the professional and vice versa.
- Find the balance that works for you.

Some points from the discussion:

- Smart phones are good tools for optimizing your time, but make sure you know where the off button is.
- Sport is a good way to meet people and enjoy yourself away from work.
- A partner helps keep you in check.
- Cooking helps you focus on being healthy and helps bring a family together.
- Some participants said they felt guilty about not doing enough work, particularly when other people arrive at work earlier and/or leave later than them. But the point was made that career progression is based on what you achieve, not how many hours you work.
- Don't feel bad about taking personal time.
- It's OK to say you're tired and need a holiday.
- It can be difficult to multitask; most people work better when concentrating on one task.

Work-life balance is different for everyone. Remember that your self is the foundation of all your interactions in life. The Effort-Recovery Theory states that our bodies have a fundamental need to rest and recover after exertion, and that includes both physical and mental exertion.

Advice for reducing work-related stress:

- Take control of your work by avoiding long hours and additional responsibilities. This can be difficult but small changes can make a difference.
- Learn to say “no” more often. If you can't fit something into your life, it's best to admit it. Tell your supervisor you don't have time for something rather than letting them down.
- Set aside some time in the day to do the things you enjoy.
- For more information see [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) (Fact Sheet 6).

The Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act (1986) states that it is the employer's responsibility to provide a safe workplace. This includes a duty of care for workers' health and wellbeing, which may be affected by bullying. If you, or other people, are being bullied at work, you should tell somebody. There are many people you can contact in or outside of your work.

Results from the research literature by Barbara Pocock:

- One central characteristic of a good job is one with reasonable hours, that enable us to have the time, energy and opportunity to engage in important life activities, and also to have rest and recovery time.
- Quality is another recurrent theme. Good quality jobs have great value beyond their monetary work and wage returns. They can provide meaning, satisfaction, education, a sense of achievement, opportunities to contribute to large goals, and are often the source of friendship and social networks.
- Another cornerstone of a good job is control. In general, some degree of influence and

control over our situations and activities is beneficial to health.

- Flexibility is most likely to be pernicious where there are excessive work demands as well as expansive working time boundaries.

It's in everyone's interest that you stay healthy and happy, so work places are usually happy to discuss solutions. Look after each other at work.

Family planning and the two-body problem: Vera Rubin has advised young astronomers to "marry well!" You need your partner to be supportive, and likewise you need to be supportive. Not all partners can travel around the world for work, e.g. a lawyer or doctor would have to retrain. Talk to others about the two-body problem and find out how they managed.

From Willimas & Ceci (2012): Women scientists that want to become mothers are faced with a conundrum: Should they risk their careers for the sake of having children earlier, or risk lower fertility and birth complications for the sake of their careers? Fertility data from Velde & Pearson (2002) show a rapid decline in fertility between PhD/post-doc period and tenure period. There's no right time to have a child but there's also no wrong time. Remember that you can pause your career but not your body clock.

If you take a career break for family or other reasons, there are some things you can do to help your career stay afloat:

- Get a mentor
- Get on a committee
- Get a student
- Get on a solid collaboration
- Get a support network in place
- If you're in Sydney or Melbourne, get on a wait list for childcare!

In general, these points help you stay active and connected without requiring too much time.

Don't suffer in silence when the going gets tough. Use the resources and flexibility that you have access to when working in a university or government organization. Nobody is going to die, and millions of dollars won't be lost, if you don't show up for work tomorrow!

#### Interesting quotes from the discussion

"In the event of a change in cabin pressure, remember to secure your own oxygen mask before assisting others"

"If the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook can get home in time for dinner, so can you"

"You can pause your career but not your body clock"

"Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life"