

dear residents

Work-Life Imbalance

April 30, 2023

Dear Residents,

Much has been written about **work-life balance** and its more contemporary version, work-life integration. The trouble with the concept is that it assumes that work is arduous, unlikeable and takes away from the life we want to lead. It assumes that work = unhappy and that when we are done with work, i.e., are living, then we are = happy. There is no question that work is a transaction – we sell our time and talents so that we can earn enough money to procure the things we love and to provide for those we love. But it need not be an unhappy venture – we can (and should) experience joy in work.



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When we view work as unhappy, we tend to focus on the stress, pressure, and burnout that is either intrinsic to work or results from it. Conversely, we view life as happy = time to relax, to be with our loved ones or to have the time to pursue our interests and hobbies. This neat demarcation is far from what actually transpires. **The fact is that there is no such thing as work-life balance.** If you happen to find that moment that work and life are in perfect balance, it will be so transient that you will want to yell, “no-one move... I’m experiencing work-life balance.” A split second later something will change, and you will be in imbalance.

Marcus Buckingham in [Love + Work](#), questions the whole premise of “balance.” The idea of balance is rooted in the four humors described by **Hippocrates** (black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm). The phlegmatic person had an abundance of phlegm while the sanguine person had an abundance of blood. The healthy person, on the other hand, was the one who had the perfect mix of the four humors. Hence **balance became synonymous with health**, and we have been pursuing balance nirvana ever since (even after the four humors were replaced with the metaphysical four elements - earth, fire, water and air).

Buckingham summarizes the **problem with work-life balance** as “an ideal that erases our humanity – the essence of who each of us is and aspires to be – and replaces it with a Sisyphean coping strategy.” He suggests that **health is less balance than it is motion**. The world gives us raw materials that we process, and we give something back to this world with our energy and spirit. There is constant motion from input to output. There is no static balance – we live in flow. Buckingham suggests that **love-in-work is what matters most**. He explains it further as the *skill of finding love in what you do rather than simply doing what you love*. When we find love in what we do, we become productive, creative, generous, resilient, innovative, collaborative, open and powerful. This state is what the Greeks called eudaimonia.

The real power of you is that you are unique – this is a feature and not a bug. Take this unique you and design the most intelligent, honest, and effective way to find love in what you do and who you do it for – your patients, your teammates, your community. Replace the false notion of balance with true joy in work. Each day I witness this *love-in-work* – the care you take in presenting instructive patients, in finding out what’s wrong with them and how to fix it, and in the pleasure we experience when you share your unique self with the rest of us.

I don’t expect you to find love in everything you do. If you find love in compliance modules, I would be really worried about you! But it’s important to find love in a decent slice of your workday. There is **eustress** (when you get lost in your work, when it invigorates you and you lose track of time) and there is **distress** (when work truly drains you and you can’t wait to be done with it). I hope your eustress to distress ratio is a favorable one. It is my quest to continuously redesign the training experience to advance *eustress* and minimize *distress*.

I am truly grateful to you for enriching all our work.

Dino Kazi