



onlyPulpandPaperJobs.com

The folly of the Life Balance Concept

By Paperitalo Staff

Kids are coming out of college these days and asking job interviewers a question something like this, “What is your life balance program?” Google “Life Balance” and you will find pages of advice, coaching schemes, apps, spreadsheets, you name it.

Let me ask you this. If you are about to undergo brain surgery, do you want a doctor that (a) thinks and breathes brain surgery day and night or (b) a doctor who skipped the last few seminars on latest techniques to go to their kid’s soccer games? You don’t have to answer—you will embarrass yourself.

Or how about this? Have you ever seen a gymnastics star at the Olympics, or for that matter, any athlete, who attributes their rise to the top of their profession to a careful regimen of “life balance?”

Don’t get me wrong, your children, spouse and others in your family will appreciate it if you take a life balance approach to adulthood. In fact, there is an old saying: “no one on their deathbed ever said, ‘I wish I had spent more time at work.’”

The stark reality, however, is this: No one striving for life balance will ever reach the top of their profession. No one striving for life balance will ever rise to a high level in any company. The Duck Dynasty folks look like they have achieved life balance, but I can tell you without checking further, at least up until their recent television stardom, they worked hard at work to make a go of it. I suspect they work hard at television production to make it look easy.

Life Balance goals are a submission to mediocrity. Try it at work, and while you are home with the kids someone else will be outcompeting you. Try it at home, and you have to put your kids in day care to go to work, depriving your kids of your parenting. Day care centers are no excuse for good parenting (note: I am not suggesting which parent needs to stay home with the kids).

Despite proclamations to the contrary, you can’t have it all. All of us just have 24 hours in the day and can really only do one thing in excellent fashion at a time. I have watched people who say they can do more than one thing at a time—they are at least fooling themselves.

My cancer doctor at Emory University Hospital is nearly 70 years old. He still puts in 14 to 15 hours per day. His assistant is similar. She has given me her pager number. She always calls back within 15 minutes, and I haven't been in the hospital since 2007 (and I am clean of cancer). I am currently in the process of having cataracts removed. My ophthalmologist tells me to call him day or night at the slightest symptom something is wrong.

I want people like this taking care of my critical health needs.

In the more mundane things you and I do for a living, the reality is there is always someone who has chosen to not pursue a life balance approach to adulthood. They will always beat out the person who has, for they simply work harder and longer. Their bosses, while smiling and praising you for finding a way to do it all, will promote them over you every time, simply because they are better at work than you are.

When I was a paper mill manager, it was during a time when contracts were being modified all over the country to run through Christmas and New Year's. Despite chest thumping by local union presidents accusing management of being atheists and anti-family, the issue was pressed on. It was not a matter of what was going on outside the mill, it was about keeping mills, especially in the north, from freezing up in the winter. We always conceded we would staff with volunteers and never force people to work unless it was absolutely necessary (and, of course, we paid triple time plus shift differential on the holidays). The problem was not getting people to work, it was turning away all those who wanted to work that we didn't need. Apparently lots of people in the paper industry had never heard of "life balance." In fact, in the paper industry, I always say a career is a lifestyle choice—you'll not change the industry.

Now, it may sound as though I have come down on one side or the other on this issue. That is not my intention. Your choice of excellence or mediocrity is up to you. Depending on your goals in life, either is acceptable. Just make sure you are not deceiving yourself as you make your choices.

For safety this week, I hope you do think about life balance when you think about safety, for an injury at home or at work is going to affect your entire life.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##