

Work-Life balance in the legal profession – a utopian idea or an achievable goal?

Ask yourself a question. At the end of your life as you contemplate what you have done, do you think you will wish you had spent more time in the office? If the answer is no, then you value your work-life balance.

We live in a fast paced world, where we can be contacted by e-mail, mobile, text, fax and now video phone 24 hours a day. The legal profession operates in a global marketplace where clients want information and advice instantly. The demands on a trainee solicitor are many and frequent, not only have you to learn every day (after all isn't that the main aim of a **training** contract) and help your training principal and other staff, you also have to pass your professional skills course and prepare for qualification. Couple those demands with the need for family, friends and recreation and it is easy to see how work-life balance can become distorted.

What work-life balance is not?

It is not about spending equal amounts of time at work and outside work. That is unrealistic. At times you will have to stay late at work and complete a deal, or prepare for a client meeting or court appearance. That is the nature of the profession. However there is a huge difference between an exception and the rule.

What is work-life balance?

Sophocles said a long time ago "Look and you will find it - what is unsought will go undetected". If you do not know what work-life balance is then how will you know where to find it when you need it? There are many definitions of work-life balance, each equally valid. My suggestion is that work-life balance is about people having choice and control over doing what matters most to them and to feel fulfilled both in and outside their work. So what does that mean to you as a trainee? Each person reading this article will probably have their own views on what work-life balance means to them and some may disagree with my suggestion. That is great. Work-life balance is about choice. It is about knowing what matters most to you as an individual and making choices to ensure that whatever fulfills you takes place in your life both at and outside work.

Do you really want work-life balance?

That is an important question. There will be some people reading this article who spend their whole life working, at the expense of friends, family and recreation. As long as that course of action is their choice then it should be respected as we should not impose a particular way of working on everybody. Again, it comes down to choice. Evidence would suggest that to choose to spend all your time at work is not the norm and that people in general would like to work towards work-life balance.

How to achieve work-life balance

As trainee solicitors you are in a privileged and unique position. You are at the start of a career that can be exciting, rewarding, fulfilling and for some, very well paid. You also have the power to influence and shape the future of the legal profession; after all you are the partners and leaders of the future.

If you follow the **D.A.D** format it will help you instill some balance to your life. How much is up to you.

Decide

Appointment

Do

Decide

Firstly, decide what matters most to you in your life and write it down. This makes it real to you and gives you a reference point. So for example, you may enjoy running or eating out with your friends. You may also enjoy the cut and thrust of a corporate deal or representing clients at a police station. Whatever they are, just write down 3 things at work and 3 outside work that matter to you the most.

Appointment

Secondly, each week decide one important thing in both work and life that you want to do that week and schedule it in your diary. Write it in as an appointment, just as you would for a court appointment or client interview. If something comes up that conflicts it will be easier to say no to the other if your

time has been scheduled. People accept no more readily when you back it up with something that is already in place.

Do

Thirdly, do what matters most to you. See how it makes you feel as you exercise control and choice over your working week, after all no one forces you to have a certain friend so why not exercise the same choice at work. I hear people thinking, but I do not have a choice at work I'm a trainee, I do what I am told to do. You do have a choice. If your firm removes that choice then perhaps it is time to consider whether it is the right place for you.

Utopian or achievable goal?

In the words of Carl Gustav Jung "Life is something that has to be lived and not talked about" Will you embrace work-life balance or just talk about it. That is for you to decide. You have the choice, the question is will you exercise it.

End.

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