**Episode #12**

**Speaker 1** [00:00:01] Welcome to the Cabrera Lab Podcast. Not much.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:08] Another day!

**Speaker 1** [00:00:09] another episode.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:10] Another episode, another day, another episode. That's our new, our new thing. Yes. I overheard a conversation the other day.

**Speaker 3** [00:00:18] You're age-dropping.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:20] I was in line.

**Speaker 3** [00:00:22] That's the other one.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:24] I think you don't realize, I don't think people don't realize how.

**Speaker 3** [00:00:28] out there.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:28] loud they are, and how open they are in public when they're speaking about things. I am not an eavesdropper by nature, but you know, you've noticed the trend where people talk on speakerphone in public.

**Speaker 3** [00:00:43] Yeah, that's fine.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:44] I mean, come on. Anyway, I was in line the other day and I overheard two younger people, a man and a woman, speaking about this idea of work-life balance. They were talking about, I know for us, our generation are like, what is that?

**Speaker 1** [00:01:04] Is that the topic? For what? Work-life balance.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:07] I was thinking about it because these two younger people, I would say they were probably in their 20s, maybe middle 20s were equating this idea of creating work-life balance as a means to creating happiness. Yeah. And I was think about you and I always talk about the mental models we have and how they shape our actions, our behaviors, the decisions we make. And to me, it occurred to me I wanted to talk to you about that. Is this setting yourself up in a way for failure? Is work-life balance a myth? Is it even a mental model we should be pursuing? Is it always connected to happiness? And just doing the thing I do in my brain.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:56] Well, it is what you make it, you know, I mean, so, I mean, work-life balance is just another mental model that we have. And, you know, this one's sort of a simple one, because it's what we call an RDS, which is two things that are related. Right, so you have two things, work and life, and they're related by a relationship that we might call. balance, no pun intended, balance on the pen there. Right? And so we're trying to figure out what this balance thing is between these two things, this balanced relationship between work and life. We also have to zoom in to and distinguish what is work, what is life, how is life different from work, how is life similar to work, what's part of work, what's part of life. And so, you know, work might have some pieces to it and life might have pieces to. And that's if you wanna distinguish those two things, right, so you've already started with the notion of something, a mental model of something which may or may not be the mental model that you personally wanna choose for your life.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:15] meaning deciding that they need to be separate.

**Speaker 1** [00:03:19] is the first part. The label work-life balance, which labels this whole system, implies that this system exists. And the question is, does it? Is that the best way for you to look at work and life? And it might be. You might decide, yeah, this is a good model for me. I want to make sure here's my work. I want keep it separate from my life. Here's my life, I keep it separated from my work, and I want a balance them. But the whole, that whole way of thinking is just one way of thinking. You could also think, how would I better integrate these things into, you know, so here's one model, right? Right. You know, a different model is, here's a life, and there's some work. And there's some not work inside of it. Right. Right. Or, here is a life and there are just components to life, right? So that's That's a different model than this model.

**Speaker 2** [00:04:19] But what's interesting is, there are a couple of things that are interesting watching you do this. The first is, when you do have a distinction between work and life, then these particular people that I overheard talking, they really need to focus in on this, understanding, distinguishing, trying to build their better understanding of what it means to balance them.

**Speaker 1** [00:04:45] Yes, except I would say if they quickly go into this balance thing and they start deconstructing what are the parts of balance, how do I achieve balance, you're already kind of down the road on a bunch of assumptions that work and life are separate. And that might be the way that you want to have it, but it might not be. I'll give you an example. For my own life, I've attempted... not distinguish between life and work. I want my work to be entirely integrated into my life. I want it to be in flow. I'm not saying that's right, I'm just saying it was right for me. So if you start with this model, you start with a set of assumptions that if you never question those assumptions in the first place and just get to work on the balance, you never sort of question, well, is work really distinctly separate thing from life. And should it be, you know, we spend eight hours a day times 300, you know, 200 and whatever, 300 days a year or whatever the, the, uh, calculation is for however many years, how much of what percentage of your life is that work and, and you're going to separate it from life, those are questions that you can ask yourself based on this model. and ask yourself, is this a model that I want to continue utilizing as the way that I structure things?

**Speaker 2** [00:06:20] Right, and what's interesting is when somebody says the words work-life balance, there's a structure, those words imply a structure.

**Speaker 1** [00:06:32] That distinction is this whole system. This is a distinct system called work-life balance. And when they say the words, the label for the distinction, work-Life balance, this is work-Life balance. This is what they mean. This is the structure. Work is distinguished from life. And there is a relationship. And that relationship sometimes gets a kilter. And we want to bring it into balance. And generally speaking, I think what they mean is that this one, this work one, tends to get in the way of this life one. That tends to be the implication. But whether or not that's the case isn't neither here nor there. But the point is, do you wanna make these distinctions in the first place? And if you do, great, then you can move on to, if you've challenged this distinction between work and life, and you've challenge what. exactly constitutes work and what constitutes life and how they're different, then you can then move on to the balance part. But if you jump right to the balanced part, without questioning whether or not these are things that you want to exist, distinctions that you wanna adhere to, then I think you can get caught up in a concept that isn't yours, it was just handed to you and you never questioned it.

**Speaker 2** [00:07:54] Yeah, I think you get caught up in a concept that isn't necessarily yours, and then you also get into a concept that so many people have opinions about. And it's almost as if you want to take a step back and first recognize the distinction you're making, question what are the implications of that distinction that I'm making. Does it mean that I am constantly unhappy over here because I have this mental model that this has to be nine to five. No emails on the weekends. Well, the world doesn't quite work that way anymore, which means you're sort of setting yourself up for frustration because it's kind of a false distinction at this point in some ways.

**Speaker 1** [00:08:38] Yeah, I mean, but it depends, for example, you know, I'll give you a great example, like an example where maybe this is exactly the model that you want. So I'm not criticizing this model. What I'm simply saying is make sure this is the model for you. Yes. So for example let's say you're want to be an Olympic athlete and you want to win the gold medal. I do. Right? I want to. In swimming or something. And, you know... The bills, you gotta pay your bills. You try to keep your bills real low and all that so that you can focus on coaching and, you know, access and all of that stuff, right? But you're working to become, you're workin' to get to the Olympics. Well, places like Home Depot have a great program from what I understand for that type of person where they can kinda have a job that doesn't get in the way of their life, right. So the job, workin at Home Depot. doesn't get in the way of their life, which is become an Olympic athlete. And while you're working your way up to becoming an Olympic athlete, you might have to have this kind of work life balance because you really care about making it to the Olympics. Right? You know, no offense to Home Depot, but you maybe you don't care that much about your job. And in that particular case, this is a reasonable model. because it represents reality, the reality of your situation well.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:07] I think what you're getting at is the difference between the job and a career. So like a lot of actors have jobs doing other things until their acting takes off. So they wait table. You hear celebrities all the time from, oh, I used to be a bartender, I use to be this. So it's the same thing with athletes, right? So there's a job and that job allows you to be working on your life, which is actually a career athlete or, you know, so there's, which is interesting just now all of these distinctions. start out seeming clear, and then the more you talk about them, they get a little...

**Speaker 1** [00:10:41] That's how all distinctions work. Fuzzier. Yeah, they get fuzzier, I mean, I think we, the dirtbags and the funhogs that I come from.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:49] The group that you ascribe to.

**Speaker 1** [00:10:51] Climbers, and we call ourselves dirtbags and fun hogs and things like that, because we were kind of seasonal. We seasonally guided, and then we seasonally skied, and you know, we were just always chasing the snow or chasing the climbs or chasing whatever, and, we lived in our cars and we took jobs at different places, but it was never about the job. It was about the skiing, or it was about whatever, so we kind of, before this was even a term, we were doing work-life balance. But that's very different. If somebody said to you, tomorrow, you can have a life where you're doing the thing you love as part of your work, your answer to that question is really interesting, right? Because some people would say, no, I wouldn't take it. I want this to be my hobby. I don't want this be my job. I see. Right? But some people would say, oh, that's my dream come true. I want to do my hobby for my job, right? And if your answer is the first one, then this model probably can very much serve you. But if your answers the second one, you're really talking about a different model, which is, how do I sustain myself at a job so that I can make my life my career? And that's a different mental model than this one. because that one is totally not in balance. That one is how do I utilize this in order to attain this and get rid of this? So it changes the relationship fundamentally, is no longer a balancing relationship, it's a causal relationship. And it's not about balance. It's about, we're utilizing this thing as a means to an end. Right. Right, so it has a similar relational structure but the relationship has an arrow going this way and this is a means-to-an-end. We're not trying to balance these two things. We're trying to get rid of this thing and have this thing absorb the entire life.

**Speaker 2** [00:12:56] which then becomes that.

**Speaker 1** [00:12:57] which becomes this. So again, it's not that mental models are good or bad. It's that you want the mental model to best represent the situation that you're actually in. And that model will serve you. Any other model is not going to serve you, it's gonna constantly make you make decisions that are not in alignment with what you actually are trying to accomplish.

**Speaker 2** [00:13:22] There seem to be almost collective or societal mental models that pop up. So for example, I remember, it might have been last weekend, I answered an email. It was probably 10 o'clock on a Saturday night. And the person, I answer them, they were on the west coast, I'm on the east coast. I answered them at 10 o clock my time, this email on a Saturday, and they immediately responded and said, What are you doing on your email at 10 o'clock on a Saturday night as if I'm not supposed to be on my email at ten o' clock because I'm in work-life balance. You know what I mean? So there's almost this sense of some of our societal norms or expectations. It just occurred to me when you were actually mental models that are shared by a bunch of people. And then also at times, I don't want to say judgmental. It felt a little judgmental when I got that response. It's like. are you why are you on your email at 10 o'clock at night on a Saturday as if I don't have a life because I'm answering an email but the truth it was a tiny email is sort of time-sensitive as I go I could just answer this now and then I'll have to worry about it you know get it done yeah so I don't know I just I think it's interesting that you can go from one conversation between two people about something and then you can start to see that these structures actually start to permeate norms and expectations of groups and things like that.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:55] Yeah, I mean, I'm I mean all norms are mental models. They're just shared mental models and I think you bring up a an important point, which is, you know, we get these. Ideally, you want your mental models to be your mental model, the ones you chose purposefully metacognitively, you know, that's why metac cognition is so important because you get to choose rather than have it chosen for you. I think that's absolutely the most important thing about metacognition is like if you want to choose to eat a Twinkie, great. Go eat as many Twinkies as you want, but don't have your Twinky choose you, right? Don't have the marketing that's behind the company choose you, right? If you want it choose to look at your phone, great, look at you phone, but don t have the phone making the choice for you. And same with these culturally accepted mental models that come and go and are trendy and all that kind of stuff is like, is that really what I, is that the way I think or did I just adopt the thing that was trendy or the thing that is trending or the things that is the norm? And just because something's popular doesn't make it promising, doesn't it make it powerful. It just might just be popular.

**Speaker 2** [00:16:24] which it seems to me that what that means is when you're saying, choose a Twinkie because you want to eat a Twinky, not because some neuromarketer has figured out how to manipulate your formation of a mental model that makes you then eat a twinkie.

**Speaker 1** [00:16:41] Yeah, I mean, it's sort of the mental model isn't choosing us, that some other person is choosing a mental model for us or a group of people is manipulating us to choose a mental model and to think that there's no choice, that it's just something that you have to adopt or whatever. And so, you know, work-life balance or any of the things, any of things that are out there and trending. I always, you know. Distinguish between fashion and trend, you know, like you want to be fashionable, but not trendy And I think the same thing is with your you know fashion lasts for forever, right? Fashion style is timeless But trends are trends same thing with you can apply that principle to mental models is like Be fashionable, not trendy

**Speaker 2** [00:17:33] Yeah, I like that. I think what's really interesting to me and

**Speaker 1** [00:17:37] Or be trendy, you know, you can-

**Speaker 2** [00:17:39] We'll be trendy when you want to be trendy.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:41] being trendy.

**Speaker 2** [00:17:41] There are things that are fun trends to participate once in a while because you find them fun.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:50] if you're making the conscious choice. I mean, I don't mean to go dark or anything, but you know, what Hitler did was trending. That is right. That's what he did was a trend. Yes. Right. And it was a bunch of mental models that people adopted without thinking. Yes. That those mental models became their mental models. Because he helped them. Because he and his marketing effort. help them build it to great pain and suffering for a lot of people. And so these trends can be innocent, but they can also be incredibly damaging. It's how we get people to buy into things they shouldn't buy into.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:35] Right, but yes, the reverse of that is quite liberating, which is if you understand how you're building your mental models, and you're checking the distinctions you're making, seeing how you are organizing things, the relationships you're make between things, it's far less easy for people to build them for you.

**Speaker 1** [00:18:56] Absolutely. That's why we have a flag on our barn that says, you know, think it's patriotic because probably the most democratic and patriotic and American thing that you could do is to think for yourself. That right. You know, not just accept the trendy things that are going on, not just except the thing that is easy, but, you, know, oh, interesting work-life balance. You know, think about it. What does that mean? What does it mean? Does it mean this? Oh, is that a good model for me? I don't know. It's not for me.

**Speaker 2** [00:19:34] Well, also, but no, but not just that, there are costs sometimes. So for example, for a long time, I mean, I think this happens with parents when they have children. They believe that they should be striving for work-life balance. The reality is, children throw everything off. So you end up working at 11 o'clock on a Friday night because you can't any other way. And so you can start to see it differently as You know, here's my life, and my life has like that model. My life has all these parts, and I'm going to deal with them in the reality in which they present themselves.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:13] Or I can affect that reality, right? I can effect that reality by having clearer mental models. Say more. Meaning you might be in a situation where you have, you know, yeah, I don't really want to do this job, but the job's paying the bills and maybe you're not even an Olympic athlete so you're even working towards that, you're just, you are just like, you know, surviving and you are working the job in order to pay the bills, and it's just the cyclical, you now, thing that's exhausting. You got to create a mental model in your life that says, this is where I'm at right now, I'm in this cycle, but how am I not going to be in this circle anymore? What things can I do to not be in the cycle? What is the set of things that I can do to get out of this? So you can build a different mental model, I'm gonna deconstruct this one, but there's some set of thing that I could do, incrementally, one day at a time, maybe not all at once. that will get me to a different life than the one that I'm currently at.

**Speaker 2** [00:21:21] Right, or the one that I was talking about.

**Speaker 1** [00:21:22] Which is cyclical which is which is just doing all this to maintain this to do this to maintain this, to do, this to, maintain this which is like a never-ending cycle of exhaustion, right? Okay, well if I have to do you know one, two, three, four, five, six, seven things to maintain, this life of you know five things, right, right. So this is what I'm currently in. I got to do these seven things to maintain. This life of five things. Okay. Can I do one less thing over here and maintain one less thing over here and then utilize that energy? Give me that pen over there, you know, to...

**Speaker 2** [00:22:06] Oh, to create a difference.

**Speaker 1** [00:22:06] to create a different option so that I can choose a different option. Right now, I don't have an option. I just have this option. But I can open up my options. And maybe I can I can take something from here and take not everything that's not realistic. But maybe I Can save, save a little over here, and fudge a little, over here or quiet quit a little or whatever. There's all kinds of things you can do over here. And I can take those energy units. and apply them to a course of action that's gonna end up giving me a different option.

**Speaker 2** [00:22:40] Yeah, and the best example of that that I've seen, I've talked to a lot of people who are sort of early part of their career, and they've realized that this isn't working for them long term. So they go and they enroll in an online or a nighttime program to get them on a path towards something different, right, towards something where their work and life are more integrated because they're doing something they love or something that creates energy for them. So they'll do exactly that, they'll put some effort into something like that.

**Speaker 1** [00:23:12] And I think that's true, except that things change like we talked about in our last episode. Things are constantly changing because the world is adapting. So people come along and they go, oh, people that are in this struggle want to go to school. So we'll make school a thing. And then all of a sudden you go over here thinking, oh I'm going to go school and I'm gonna get out of this cycle. and you get saddled with debt. that people are willing to give you and suddenly you're worse in this cycle, right? Because now you've got all this debt over here. Now we've just added debt, right. Now there's more debt. If you went to an Ivy League, there's even more debt, all right. Right, then you're screwed. So we gotta think that through. You gotta think those things through because the life has changed a little bit. The society's changed a bit, right, Now, the question is, you know, what can you not learn online for free? What, or for much lower cost, what do you need a degree? I mean, Google, you know, Google's talking about that they're not looking for Ivy League degrees anymore. They're not even looking for degrees, right? Right. So, you don't, maybe you don' need that kind of expense to get out of the hole that you're in or the cycle that you are in.

**Speaker 2** [00:24:35] So that's kind of depressing.

**Speaker 1** [00:24:38] Yeah, it is.

**Speaker 2** [00:24:39] So what do you do about it?

**Speaker 1** [00:24:42] Don't make this mistake. Make sure that this is an investment that's gonna pay off, right? It's like saying, you know, oh, I need, you know I need the thing that's stopping me from having this life is enough money, so I'm gonna go to Vegas and gamble. Well, that's a dumb decision. You're not distinguishing between gambling, which is high risk, high reward. and something that's gonna be kind of lower risk, lower reward, maybe incremental, maybe, you know, something like that. So, and don't buy into the societal norms.

**Speaker 2** [00:25:24] Meaning, don't subscribe to other people's mental models about things. Build your own and figure out ways that don't actually...

**Speaker 1** [00:25:34] Let me put it this friendly. If I say, let's wipe all this plate in here for a second. You have two things. You have a college degree. Well, a college degree is worthless. A college degree is massively important, right and can increase your you know, net worth and earning potential for decades. Right. Which one's true? Depends on the context depends on the context, depends on The degree depends. It depends. it depends. Depends is the answer. So don't don't just listen to Elon Musk when he I'll see you guys next time. You know, all college degrees are useless, we don't need to do it, you shouldn't go get it. Okay, there's some truth in that. And don't listen to all these colleges that are selling you grad degrees for 30 and $60,000 that are cash cows for them. Right. there's some truth to that, right? So there's truth to both of these, but don't group those two examples, which are true, as being that that applies to all of these examples where a college degree doesn't do that, where a collage degree does train you to be an engineer or do something that other people can't do. And it does train and give you connections and networks and opportunities and things like that, Right? Don't buy into the hype is the point. Make your own mental models and investigate further to sort of say, hey, you know what? There's truth in both of these statements. It's an and both, not an either or. It's not college degrees are useless, college degrees or useful. It's sometimes they can be useful and sometimes they could be useless. Make sure you find the one that isn't useless.

**Speaker 2** [00:27:30] Right, and I also think when, I think that's right, when you're presented with two opposing views, to me, I mean, I'm older, so I've sort of learned a lot, to me I'm always like, I always tell myself, the truth is probably somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. And I think, that's true of a lot of things that are framed for us generally, mental models that people offer us that are sort of these opposite extremes. Mm-hmm. And I think. As a habit, what we should do is focus on, well, it's not this or that. That's like what you said. It's and, and both, which means that somewhere in the middle of these two is a, is a truth that works the truth.

**Speaker 1** [00:28:12] Yeah, and it kind of depends what you mean by middle, because in the case of, you know, should I be far left or should I far right politically, yeah, well, I think most reasonable people are kind of literally in the middle, they exist in the middle. Right. But in this particular case, this degree offered by this college and this program at this price is not in the middle. This one sucks. This one is not. Doesn't suck. You're gonna make more money in your life, year upon year upon your compounding. You're going to have skills that other people don't have and it's going to be a meaningful degree. What you got to figure out, so neither of these are in the middle. They exist here and here. Interesting. What we have to do is be able to distinguish between this and this because the people that are selling this are gonna want this to look a lot like this. They're gonna... They're gonna make these two things. I'll never forget, I was in Vietnam and we walked up on this, what's that place with the big guitar? Hard Rock Cafe.

**Speaker 2** [00:29:20] Oh, I was trying to think, what would have a big guitar in Vietnam? Vietnam.

**Speaker 1** [00:29:25] So we walk into this... There's a Hard Rock Cafe in Vietnam? There is. This Hard Rock Café in the middle of nowhere Vietnam, right? And it's like the Hard Rock, and we're like, what? What is going on? Hard Rock cafe. So we go in, it is literally a fake dive bar Hard Rock café. They've completely just stolen the Hard rock café marketing, the whole thing. but it is a dingy dive bar. Wow. But they got us. They got us to come in, right? Because it was like something we recognized as being you know, whatever. And so when these folks are selling it, they're selling it as as that they're telling it to look like this. It's just like when you buy these, you know you people want to Mercedes people want a nice car. So they buy the... You know, the $20,000 version of that nice car, the $30,000 dollar version of the $100,000 car. Well, you're kinda getting ripped off. You'd be better off buying a $30 thousand car that's really a $30000 car, rather than a $17,000 that has a 12 or $13,000 logo on it.

**Speaker 3** [00:30:40] Right.

**Speaker 1** [00:30:40] right? So you're probably going to get less quality there because it's, but it, but it's it's they're selling it to pretend to be something that they're not.

**Speaker 2** [00:30:51] so you have to look deeper.

**Speaker 1** [00:30:52] Yeah, nature does this all the time, by the way. Nature mimics all the time. So you know, they pretend that the birds that puff their chest out, they're pretending to be big, they are camouflaging, they are pretending to the trees. They're pretending to be whatever. Nature is constantly mimicking and pretending to be something that it's not. And so this is just built into marketing and things like that.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:13] Yeah, I mean, and I guess to me, it reminds me of what we were talking about, I don't know if it was this couple of episodes ago, about the false relationships people will build for you between and among things. So I think we're talking about happy meals. And there was another one.

**Speaker 1** [00:31:32] Coke is life.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:33] Focus Life.

**Speaker 1** [00:31:34] Coke is friendship. No, it's not. It's sugar water. It's goop. It's liquid goop It's Liquid Goop.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:41] and also.

**Speaker 1** [00:31:42] Twinkie. We're never going to get any sponsorship, because we just rip on companies. Only goop companies. Huge goop company.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:50] No, there are other things that we...

**Speaker 1** [00:31:52] I think we're not going to get Mercedes.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:56] or Gatorade.

**Speaker 1** [00:31:57] Or Gatorade.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:00] I don't know.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:00] Not that we're thinking about it, but...

**Speaker 2** [00:32:02] No, that's funny.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:04] Can I keep talking?

**Speaker 2** [00:32:05] If you go back to where we...

**Speaker 1** [00:32:07] We're getting like Joe's barbecue.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:08] Is there a Joe's Barbecue somewhere?

**Speaker 1** [00:32:10] answer somewhere. There's some guy named Joe that has a barbecue.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:14] I thought it was good.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:15] The Cabrera Lab podcast sponsored by Joe's Barbie.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:18] in the middle of nowhere, somewhere.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:21] Sponsored by the Hard Rock Cafe. We're like, sponsored by-

**Speaker 2** [00:32:25] We're sponsored by water. water. I think that was really interesting. I think, that's a wrap. I think we've talked about.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:34] Work-life balance.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:36] Work-life balance, that's it. That's, it's all a mental model.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:39] Work-life balance, is it a thing?

**Speaker 2** [00:32:44] It is a mental model.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:45] It is a mental model thing, but is it a thing?

**Speaker 2** [00:32:49] That's for you to decide.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:51] for you to decide.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:52] And that. That's