

HALF-TRUTHS IN THE WORKPLACE

ADVICE ON HOW TO ACHIEVE A SANE WORK-LIFE BALANCE HAS BECOME a cottage industry. Numerous books on the subject have been published within the past few years alone, many of which I've read with pleasure. But they are all aimed at workers, overwhelmingly women, who are presumed to have the responsibility of stretching the twenty-four hours in a day to cover an impossible and never-ending list of things to get done. Why not tackle this issue from a different angle? Perhaps the problem is not with women, but with *work*.

American workers all over the socioeconomic spectrum, from hotel housekeepers to surgeons, have stories about working twelve- to sixteen-hour days (often without overtime pay), experiencing anxiety attacks and constant exhaustion. Public health experts have begun talking about stress as an epidemic. Indeed, the United States is one of the only industrialized countries that does not require paid sick leave, time off during the week, or vacation days.

In 2014 alone, *Huffington Post* founder Arianna Huffington and *Washington Post* reporter Brigid Schulte each wrote a bestselling book about stressed-out American workers, another sign that

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we're desperate for solutions to our currently unsustainable pace of work. Desperate for solutions, but still trapped in a culture that values quantity over quality, assuming that he who works most works best. Or, less poetically, that he who takes time off is a wimp.

This underlying culture makes a mockery of so many purported work-life "fixes." They are never going to achieve real equality between men and women in the workplace, at the top or the bottom, no matter how hard employers try to make workplaces more family-friendly by adopting policies aimed at women. They will not work because they are at best half-measures based on half-truths.

The first half-truth is that the issue of work-life balance is a "women's problem." If we define it that way, then it is up to women to find or at least implement the solution. The second is that employers can make room for caregiving by offering flextime and part-time arrangements. While these policies certainly represent progress over rigid "all in or get out" workplaces, they're not nearly enough for many workers with caregiving responsibilities. Third is our assumption that wanting "work-life balance"—or even just wanting a life outside of work—signals a lack of commitment to that work. That assumption reflects a mindset that promotes men with full-time wives and no lives.

Once again, a half-truth is just that—it's not wholly false. But it often obscures a bigger, deeper truth, something that we do not want or do not choose to face. Yet if we cannot even be honest about what the problem is and what it would actually take to fix it, we cannot possibly succeed.

It's time for some truth telling in the office.

HALF-TRUTH: "IT'S A WOMEN'S PROBLEM"

FLORIDA STATE SOCIOLOGIST IRENE PADAVIC, Harvard Business School professor Robin Ely, and Erin Reid from Boston University's Questrom School of Business were asked to conduct a detailed study of a mid-sized global consulting firm where top management thought they had a "women's problem." The firm had a paucity of women at the highest levels—just 10 percent of partners were women, compared with nearly 40 percent of female junior employees. The firm's brass assumed that their company was shedding women along the way because of work-family conflict on the part of workers who had to care for families, i.e., women. As one partner put it:

What do I want people to worry about when they wake up first thing in the morning? For Business Development people, I want them to worry about business development. For project managers, I want them to worry about the project. Women are the Project Manager in the home, so it is hard for them to spend the necessary time, energy, and effort to be viewed here as senior leaders.

The plethora of women's leadership groups and support networks at companies across the United States all grow out of the same perception: the lack of women at the top is due to something women themselves are doing or not doing: a lack of ambition, the difficulty of juggling multiple roles at home and at work, or insufficient support from other women.

This depiction of the problem is half true, in that it is indeed a problem that is showing up much more among women than among men. But it is a problem that affects some women much more than others, and it is also a problem for a growing number

of men. By thinking of it as a “women’s problem” we are missing a much bigger truth.

It’s Not a Women’s Problem, It’s a Care Problem . . .

THOUGH WOMEN HAVE MADE UNPRECEDENTED progress in the workforce over the past forty years, what doesn’t always come through in the statistics is the enormous and enduring discrepancy between women who have caregiving responsibilities and those who do not. As I noted in the last chapter, in 2013 women earned 82 cents on a man’s dollar. But hidden within that average is a stark difference. Single women without children made 96 cents on the male dollar. Married mothers? They make 76 cents. Indeed, many writers have pointed out that motherhood is now a greater predictor of wage inequality than gender is.

This pattern is even clearer if we look through the lens of age. Girls and young women are surpassing boys in high school college, and many graduate schools and often draw higher salaries during their early years in the workforce. Overall, women between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four now make 93 percent of what their male contemporaries do. But those gains dissipate once they become mothers.

To the majority of men and women who think of caregiving as a woman’s responsibility, redefining the “women’s problem” as a “care problem” may seem redundant. Women are indeed the considerable majority of caregivers in our society. Among parents, mothers spend roughly twice as much time as fathers on childcare. And the typical caregiver of an elderly relative is a woman in her forties who provides twenty hours a week of care to her mother.

Women also face much more cultural pressure to *be* caregivers, and perfect ones at that, than men do. Even in the twenty-

first century, America looks askance at any woman who doesn’t appear to put her children’s care above her professional life. Texas politician Wendy Davis has experienced extreme scrutiny about how and where she raised her children. Her decision to leave them with her then-husband in Texas while she went to Harvard Law School has been held up as an example of her selfishness. In general, men aren’t scrutinized in the same way. As a Democratic pollster pointed out in a *New York Times* article about Davis, Rahm Emanuel left his young children behind in Washington while he was running for mayor of Chicago and no one ever said two words about it.

A physician who had two kids during her medical training wrote to me and said she feels like motherhood is the hardest thing she’s ever done, in part because of the guilt that comes with it. “There are pressures from many many different sides—for being a ‘perfect’ mother (from nursing exclusively to making my kids’ baby food from scratch!), to being a perfect doctor (well read on the latest studies, engaging in meaningful research, publishing studies). I started my first year of fellowship with a 9-week-old newborn,” she wrote to me after my article was published in *The Atlantic*. “I felt guilty for not being a good-enough mom while I was working 80 hours a week and taking overnight calls, and I felt guilty that I wasn’t giving 100% to my job.” She eventually decided to work part-time so that she could be there to put her kids to bed every night.

When I gave a talk on work and family to a group of young Hispanic men and women who had won internships and fellowships in Washington, a young woman in the audience raised her hand and talked about the way in which her family and community judged mothers, criticizing those who were not home for their children. How, she asked, could she navigate those expectations and still pursue her career? Political strategist Maria Car-

dona, who was sharing the podium with me and has been an important role model in the Hispanic community, suggested that perhaps she could rely on other women in her extended family to be caregivers. None of us challenged the premise of her question, which was that it is up to women to provide care.

The good news, however, is that the care problem is slowly but steadily becoming a men's problem too. A Wharton School study comparing expectations and attitudes between the class of 1992 and 2012 found that young women today are more likely to anticipate the stress of fitting together work and family than they were twenty years ago. Also noteworthy, however, is that 43 percent of the *men* either agree or strongly agree that their pursuit of a demanding career "will make it difficult . . . to be an attentive spouse/partner," up from 33 percent in 1992. A 2014 study of more than 6,500 Harvard Business School grads over the past few decades also found a significant shift in male attitudes. It showed that a third of male millennial HBS grads expect to split childcare responsibilities fifty-fifty with their partners, that's compared with 22 percent of Gen X men and 16 percent of boomer men.

Think about it. Almost a third to a half of the men in two highly competitive business schools, schools that attract a disproportionate number of alpha males in the first place, expect that family life will have a significant impact on their future success and personal lives. A venture capitalist friend of mine who teaches at Stanford Graduate School of Business reports a similar shift, saying that the attitudes of the young men he teaches have changed remarkably.

In an article for *The New Republic*, Marc Tracy, a twenty-nine-year-old writer, notes that some men his age have begun to have the same kind of full-throated conversation about work-life balance as their female counterparts:

Most men stress over the next step in their professions, with the attitude that if they happen to fall in love and settle down, well, that's great, too. But recently, in many cases inspired by the women in our lives and the conversation they are having among themselves, we have begun to question whether our most basic priorities aren't out of whack, and to wonder whether, for reasons both social and surprisingly biological, we shouldn't be as "ambitious" to have children as we are to land the next great job. Plus, having had children, many of us hope to play a more active role in their upbringing than has typically been expected of fathers. Many of us were lucky to have mothers who, whatever other ambitions and accomplishments they had, clearly took great joy in raising us; some of us were even lucky enough to have similar fathers. Do we want it "all"? Who knows (or cares). But we want that.

A 2013 Pew Research study on modern parenting fills in the statistics: almost as many fathers as mothers bemoan the stress of trying to juggle work and family. Fifty percent of fathers and 56 percent of mothers with children under eighteen at home said that they find it difficult "to balance the responsibilities of [their] job with the responsibilities of [their] family." And an almost equal number of fathers and mothers agreed with the statement "I would prefer to be at home raising my children, but I need to work because we need the income."

In short, both women and men who experience the dual tug of care and career and as a result must make compromises at work pay a price. Redefining the women's problem as a care problem thus broadens our lens and allows us to focus much more precisely on the real issue: the undervaluing of care, no matter who does it.

... and a Company Problem

IT'S EASY FOR EMPLOYERS TO marginalize an issue if they label it a "women's problem." A women's problem is an individual issue, not a company-wide dilemma. But again, suppose the problem is not with the woman but with the workplace. Or more precisely, with a workplace designed for what Joan Williams called an "ideal worker." The ideal worker is "the face-time warrior, the first one in in the morning and the last to leave at night. He is rarely sick. Never takes vacation, or brings work along if he does. The ideal worker can jump on a plane whenever the boss asks because someone else is responsible for getting the kids off to school or attending the preschool play." Fifteen years after Williams coined the term, the ideal worker must now also contend with a globalized workplace where someone is always awake and electronic devices ensure that someone can always reach you.

Recall the research undertaken by Professors Padavic, Ely, and Reid at the consulting firm. After careful study, they found that women and men at the firm had equal levels of distress over work-family conflicts and that equal percentages of men and women had left the firm in the past three years because they were being asked to work long hours. The firm's key HR problem was not gender, as management believed, but rather a culture of overwork.

The firm's leadership simply refused to accept these findings. They didn't want to be told that they needed to overhaul their entire organizational philosophy or that they were overpromising to clients and overdelivering (for example, making hundred-slide decks that the client couldn't even use). That would require a lot of effort and soul-searching.

What the leaders wanted to be told was that the firm's problem was work-family conflict for women, a narrative that would

not require them to make changes in anything *they* were doing or feeling. As Padavic, Ely, and Reid wryly conclude, their attitude required a "rejection [of evidence] on the part of evidence-driven analysts."

Debora Spar, president of Barnard College and author of *Wonder Women*, echoes these conclusions. "Fixing the women's problem," she writes, "is not about fixing the women, or yanking them onto committees, or placating them with yet another networking retreat. It's about fixing the organization—recognizing a diversity of skills and attributes, measuring them in a concrete way, and rewarding people accordingly."

Journalists and media companies are just as guilty of perpetuating the myth of the "women's problem." Issues of work-life balance are discussed at *The New York Times* under the rubric *Motherlode*. Other websites like *Slate* and *Huffington Post* also house smart and worthwhile discussions of work and family in old-fashioned women's sections. If you look at any large business conference, it's the same story: work and family will be framed as a women's issue, never as a mainstream issue. As one of my friends wrote to me,

I am beyond tired of these critical issues—about work culture, about gender equity, about implicit bias, about how constrained many of the "choices" for both men and women are, about the lack of meaningful family policy, about the way we live, really—always defined through the lens of the harried working mother.

A better lens is that of the harried caregiver, male or female. Best of all would be the lens of the failure of modern American companies to adapt to the realities of modern American life, insisting instead that workers turn themselves inside out to conform

to outdated twentieth-century ideas of when and where work should get done.

HALF-TRUTH: "FLEXIBILITY IS THE SOLUTION"

IF YOU ARE A YOUNG woman interviewing with a company, law firm, bank, or university that sees itself as a progressive institution and wants to recruit you, you are likely to be told about their "family-friendly policies." (If you are a young man in exactly the same situation, you are not.) Twenty percent of U.S. companies now offer paid maternity leave ranging from two to twelve weeks; 36 percent allow employees to work part-time for a while without losing their position in the company; some allow them to work from home part of the time on a regular basis; a few let them opt out of the workforce for a while and then still welcome them back in a position that reflects their previous experience.

These policies reflect genuine progress by the women's movement; those of us who have been able to take advantage of them have benefited in many ways that the majority of women have not. My two years working on the inflexible schedule of the State Department—even for a boss I loved and with the understanding that the world certainly would not wait on me—brought home the indispensability of having enough control over your own time to fit your work and your life together. In the academic world, I had that kind of flexibility. Indeed, one of the best reasons to strive to be the boss, if you can do it either before you have caregiving responsibilities or even during, is the much greater latitude you have to make sure meetings and work are in sync with your schedule rather than someone else's.

Real flexibility—the kind that gives you at least a measure of control over when and how you work in a week, a month, a year,

and over the course of a career—is a critical part of the solution to the problem of how to fit work and care together. So why then is it only a half-truth? In most workplaces, flex policies—which range from telecommuting and variable workday schedules to more radical policies like part-time jobs, job sharing, prolonged sabbaticals, or shortened workweeks—exist largely on paper. It is often exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for employees to avail themselves of them. Indeed, reading through the various studies on this point reminds me of reading through the constitutions of countries behind the Iron Curtain in the former Soviet Union and in dictatorships around the world: they all guaranteed a full panoply of rights and liberties, but only for show.

The HR department may roll out flex policies, but if you have an old-school manager, someone who came up never seeing his or her family, you are likely to face what academics drily call an "implementation gap." In other words, some managers simply refuse to let their employees take advantage of policies on the books, which explains why the National Study of Employers finds a virtual chasm between the percentage of companies that allow *some* workers to work at home occasionally (67 percent) and the percentage of companies that allow *all or most* workers to work at home occasionally (8 percent). The managers who resist change like the workplace culture the way it is—based on presence, and hence control, more than on performance. In the words of one human resources manager: when some managers "can't get someone right there at that particular moment it is actually an uneasy [feeling] for them."

Even when firms mean what they say and managers support flex policies, employees often don't ask. And for good reason. In a work culture in which commitment to your career is supposed to mean you never think about or do anything else, asking for flexibility to fit your work and your life together is tantamount to

declaring that you do not care as much about your job as your co-workers do. Dame Fiona Woolf, a British solicitor and former lord mayor of London, puts it succinctly: “Girls don’t ask for [flexible work] because they think it’s career suicide.”

Flexibility Stigma

IN 2013, THE *Journal of Social Issues* published a special issue on “flexibility stigma.” It included several studies showing that workers who take advantage of company policies specifically designed to let them adjust their schedules to accommodate caregiving responsibilities may still receive wage penalties, lower performance evaluations, and fewer promotions.

A young woman who wrote to me, Kathryn Beaumont Murphy, was already a mother when she became a junior associate—a rarity at big law firms. She had a generous maternity leave and took advantage of their flextime policy when she returned after having her second child. She was allowed to work “part time” for six months after her maternity leave ended, though it was still forty hours a week. “At the end of that six-month period,” Murphy says, “I was told by the male leadership of my department that I could not continue on a flexible schedule as it would hurt my professional growth.” She ended up leaving the firm entirely for a less prestigious job that pays much less, but where she has more control over her schedule. Her children are now five and eight, and after her experience she now believes that “flexibility is as valuable as compensation.”

If anything, men who try to take advantage of flexible policies have it even worse. Joan Blades and Nanette Fondas, co-authors of *The Custom-Fit Workplace*, give the example of a law firm associate named Carlos who tried to arrange for paternity leave and

was told that his company’s parental leave policy was really meant just for women. But even if his firm had said yes, it’s likely that he then would have paid an even bigger price in terms of his chances for advancement and overall mistreatment than his female colleagues did.

A Catalyst study showing that men and women tend to use flexibility policies differently underlines the dangers that men perceive. The men and women in their study were equally likely to use a variety of flextime arrangements, from flexible arrival and departure times to compressing work in various ways across the week. But women were 10 percent more likely than men to work from home and men were almost twice as likely as women to say that they had never telecommuted over the course of their careers. Patterns like these show that men are aware that if a certain kind of flexibility means a lot less face time at the office, they won’t run the risk of being penalized for taking advantage of it.

To be stigmatized means to be singled out, shamed, and discriminated against for some trait or failing. Stigma based on race, creed, gender, or sexual orientation is sharply and explicitly disapproved of in contemporary American society. Why should stigma based on taking advantage of company policy to care for loved ones be any different? Workers who work from home or even take time off do not lose IQ points. Their choice to put family alongside or even ahead of career advancement does not necessarily affect the quality of their work, even if it reduces the quantity.

However effective flexibility policies may seem in theory, flexibility cannot be the solution to work-life issues as long as it is stigmatized. The question that young people should be asking their employers is not what kinds of family-friendly policies a particular firm has. Instead, they should ask, “How many employees

take advantage of these policies? How many men? And how many women and men who have worked flexibly have advanced to top positions in the firm?”

DANGER: When Flexible Means Disposable

THUS FAR, I’VE BEEN WRITING primarily about the white-collar world. Yet as with most things in the workplace, even the limited flexibility that white-collar workers take for granted doesn’t exist at all for low-income hourly workers. More than 70 percent of low-wage workers in the United States do not get paid sick days, which means that they risk losing their jobs when a childcare or health issue arises. In fact, nearly one-quarter of adults in the United States have been fired or threatened with job loss for taking time off to recover from illness or care for a sick loved one.

Consider the case of Rhiannon Broschat, who was fired from her job at Whole Foods during the frigid winter of 2014 because Chicago schools were closed due to inclement weather. Broschat, who is also a student at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, called her mother to see if she could watch her son, but her mother had to work. Then she called several friends to babysit, but they too had to work. Broschat couldn’t swap shifts with a co-worker, because at the time, Whole Foods policy required workers to swap shifts forty-eight hours in advance. She had no way out. Broschat’s story—she is now a senior at Northeastern Illinois—is so emblematic of how low-wage women struggle to get childcare that she spoke on a panel called “Why Women’s Economic Security Matters for All,” with Hillary Clinton, Representative Nancy Pelosi, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, and Representative Rosa DeLauro in September 2014.

Schedules that are too rigid to accommodate family needs on the one hand are often too flexible on the other. Many companies

have begun to manufacture goods on flexible schedules keyed to changing demand in real time, rather than predicted demand. On the consumer side, they also now track customer flow more carefully and ask employees to adjust their schedules accordingly. In both cases, the ebb and flow of employee hours tracks the ebb and flow of customers and their desires. Walmart, Jamba Juice, Pier 1, Aeropostale, Target, and Abercrombie & Fitch are among the companies that employ a just-in-time workforce.

University of Chicago social services professor Susan J. Lambert points out that sales associates and restaurant servers only learn about their weekly schedules a few days in advance, and those schedules are always in flux. They may work seven hours one week and thirty-two the next. “Hotel housekeepers might work Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday one week, and then Sunday, Thursday and Saturday the following week,” she says.

This kind of flexibility translates into radical unpredictability, which is a nightmare for caregivers. High-income lawyers, bankers, or consultants who work at the whim of a client’s demand experience such stress all the time but typically buy their way out of it by having full-time or live-in childcare. The majority of workers without that luxury must face the drama of having to find child- or eldercare on a moment’s notice, week after week. Workers who live with extended families can sometimes manage, but they are also the most likely to have eldercare as well as childcare responsibilities.

New York Times reporter Jodi Kantor brought this experience home to millions of readers in August 2014 with her heartbreaking front-page story about twenty-two-year-old Starbucks barista and single mom Jannette Navarro. Thanks to scheduling software, which allows chains to use customer data to inform its day-to-day staffing, Navarro rarely knew her schedule more than three days before the start of the workweek. This wrought havoc

on her ability to find consistent childcare for her four-year-old son, which in turn put immense strain on her familial and romantic relationships. Her aunt became frustrated with having to pick up last-minute babysitting duties due to Navarro's erratic schedule; her boyfriend broke up with her because she was too worn out after work to keep her promises to him. She and her son lost two homes within six months, and her schedule—which some weeks required her to close the store one night at eleven P.M. and be back the next morning to open it up again at four A.M. the next day—left her so sleep-deprived she napped on the sidewalk outside the store.

The day after Kantor's article ran in the *Times*, Starbucks executives vowed to revise the scheduling software for their 130,000 employees, giving local managers more discretion and preventing employees from having to close up shop one night and then open it back up again in the predawn hours the next day. But individual fixes like this aren't a cure for the larger problems that retail and hourly workers all over the country have to deal with every day.

For millions of American workers, then, flexibility is not the solution but the problem. Women and men at the top cannot advocate for more flexibility without insisting that these policies be implemented in ways that help workers rather than hurt them. The kind of flexibility we need is about making room for care in all our lives, not an additional excuse to stop caring about the human impact of our policies.

HALF-TRUTH: "HE WHO WORKS LONGEST WORKS BEST"

"TIME MACHO," AS I LIKE to call it, is the relentless competition to work harder, stay later, pull more all-nighters, travel around the world and bill the extra hours the international dateline affords

you. One of the paragons of time macho was Ronald Reagan's ferociously competitive budget director Dick Darman. According to one story, "Mr. Darman sometimes managed to convey the impression that he was the last one working in the Reagan White House by leaving his suit coat on his chair and his office light burning after he left for home." (Darman claimed that it was just easier to leave his suit jacket in the office so he could put it on again in the morning, but his record of successful bureaucratic warfare suggests otherwise.)

In my younger years, I was an active participant in this game. Gene Sperling, who rose to become director of the National Economic Council under President Obama, was a legendary workaholic. I used to meet him at two A.M. at the vending machines in the tunnels at Harvard Law School when we were both staying up all night working on cases for different professors. And indeed, when my parents came to visit for my law school graduation, they wanted to see the big armchair in my professor's office where, I joked, I had spent more nights than in my own bed.

My patterns continued when I worked for a big New York law firm in the summer. But even as I prided myself on my ability to stay at my desk round the clock, I was uncomfortably aware that one of my close friends who was a fellow associate with me always managed to leave by six or seven P.M. and did just as much work as I did. She was simply far more efficient, spending less time procrastinating, reading the paper, talking with the guys down the hall. She later made partner at a top New York firm and explained to me that when she saw a pile of work on her desk she immediately thought about what was the most efficient way to get it all done: what she could delegate to others and what she had to do herself. I was reminded of her work habits in the fall of 2014 when I heard Virginia Rometty, the first woman CEO of IBM, explain that the key to her efficiency was doing work "that only I

can do” while leaving to others all the work that could be done by someone else.

That was the first inkling that perhaps my habits were evidence not of dedication but of inefficiency. My suspicions grew shortly after I turned forty. With an infant and a toddler at home, a full load of courses to teach, research to be done, and articles to be written constantly hanging over my head, I routinely tried to get by on five to six hours of sleep, which left me short-tempered and with a constant blurry feeling that Andy used to describe as “skin-crawlingly tired.” I would call meetings with my research assistant at nine or ten P.M. at my house after the kids were in bed and not even be able to remember what it was we were supposed to be working on. One day I decided I had had enough, that life was too short to go through it in a haze of fatigue. I quickly discovered that when in fact I let myself get seven or eight hours of sleep I was happier, pleasanter, and unquestionably more productive.

That is the revelation that inspired Arianna Huffington’s book *Thrive*, where she describes literally collapsing from exhaustion and cutting her eye and breaking her cheekbone as she fell. “I was lying on the floor of my home office in a pool of blood,” Huffington writes, when she finally had a moment of clarity. Since then she has become a self-proclaimed “sleep evangelist,” urging women and men alike to “sleep their way to the top.” She reports that more than 30 percent of people in the United States are not getting enough sleep. The cost of that massive sleeplessness is reduced cognitive functioning and lower levels of emotional intelligence, empathy, and impulse control.

Let’s be clear. Many jobs have crises or deadlines where round-the-clock presence really is necessary to get the job done, where being there and doing your best really does matter more than some abstract measure of performance. I have had plenty of

times in my life when I needed people working for me who would be willing to go the extra mile and do whatever it took to get the job done, including staying up all night. When I was in the State Department and was responsible for a massive review laying out a strategy for reorganization and reform, I and a team of six Policy Planning staff members essentially worked around the clock for the better part of a month to get it across the finish line. Secretary Clinton wanted it by December 15, and given the slow and obstacle-ridden interagency approvals process, as well as the inherent difficulty of getting something done when many people with differing views had to sign off on it, that is just what it took.

I also counsel many of my students and mentees that they should divide their work lives into those phases when they *can* travel anywhere, anytime, and work long hours and those when they will not be able to, either because of caregiving responsibilities or because they want to slow down and do other things that are important to them. Working really hard for something and someone you believe in is exhilarating and often necessary. But it can and should be punctuated with periods where you take far better care of yourself. Under normal circumstances, valuing face time over results—measured by the quality and promptness of work that actually needs to get done—is just bad management.

Less Can Be More

DURING THE 2014 SUPER BOWL, Cadillac ran an ad that was meant to be a celebration of American workaholicism. It showed a clean-cut fifty-something white man with blazing blue eyes walking and talking his way through his mansion while extolling the virtues of the American work ethic. “Other countries, they work, they stroll home, they stop by the café, they take August off. *Off*. Why aren’t

you like that? Why aren't we like that? Because we're crazy, driven, hardworking believers," says the guy, who looks like a cartoon version of a one-percenter, to the camera. The moral of the ad: If you just work hard enough, avoiding vacation and "creating your own luck," anything, including the ownership of a \$75,000 car, is possible.

The ad drove me crazy. The man was so smug and so completely out of touch with what I consider to be the real values that Americans have traditionally proclaimed and tried to pass down to their children. Yes, Europeans and others often criticize American culture for being materialistic, but when Thomas Jefferson described humankind's "unalienable rights" in the Declaration of Independence, he took English Enlightenment philosopher John Locke's "life, liberty, and estate" and substituted "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." And as the behavioral psychologists tell us, happiness is more likely to be found in the pleasures of human connection and experience—a good meal, a play or movie, or sporting event, a bouquet of flowers or a bottle of champagne—than it is in an endless catalogue of possessions.

I wasn't alone in my reaction. One reporter wrote, "You know what really needs attention? What working like crazy and taking no time off really gets us[?]" It gets Americans to the grave earlier, it's made us more anxious than people in other developed countries, and it's created a group of people more disengaged from their jobs than in countries with more leisure time.

In the end, it was *New Yorker* writer Jeffrey Toobin who made the most damning argument against the commercial. As we were talking about it, he pointed out that Cadillac was disparaging the vacation-loving Europeans in an effort to sell luxury cars to a wealthy U.S. audience who prefer *German* BMWs and Mercedes. Last I checked, German workers get a mandated minimum twenty days of vacation every year.

It's that simple. German workers work at least two weeks a year less than American workers do and yet produce better cars. Perhaps that is because German managers still subscribe to the empirical findings that led Henry Ford to establish an eight-hour workday in 1914. When Ford looked at in-house research, he realized that manual laborers were finished after eight hours of work a day. After he cut hours, errors went down, and productivity, employee satisfaction, and company profits went up.

We actually have a growing body of data in support of the proposition that working less means working better. According to much more recent research, people who work principally with their brains rather than their hands have an even shorter amount of real daily productivity than manual laborers. Microsoft employees, for instance, reported that they put in only twenty-eight productive hours in a forty-five-hour workweek—a little less than six hours a day. Futurist Sara Robinson found the same thing: knowledge workers have fewer than eight hours a day of hard mental labor in them before they start making mistakes.

This relationship between working better and working less holds particularly true in any job requiring creativity, the well-spring of innovation. Experts on creativity emphasize the value of nonlinear thinking and cultivated randomness, from long walks to looking at your environment in ways you never have before. Making time for play, as well as designated downtime, has also been found to boost creativity. Experts suggest we should change the rhythm of our workdays to include periods in which we are simply letting our minds run wherever they want to go. Without play, we might never be able to make the unexpected connections that are the essence of insight.

Understanding this relationship between time on and time off also requires us to rethink leisure. Timothy Keller, a Christian theologian, laments the Western obsession with work as a cul-

tural phenomenon. Americans think about leisure as merely “work stoppage for bodily repair” rather than a time to “simply contemplate and enjoy the world.”

The Declaration of Independence notwithstanding, the United States comes fifteenth in the *World Happiness Report*, an index published annually by three distinguished economists that measures happiness as both an emotional state and a measure of life satisfaction across the globe. Switzerland came in first in 2015, but Denmark took the top spot in 2013 and 2014 and came in third in 2015. Observing this phenomenon, Brigid Schulte set out to discover the secret of Danish happiness and found it in the concept of *hygge*, which essentially means being and thriving in the moment.

After Schulte’s book *Overwhelmed* came out, New America sponsored an evening reception and panel in our New York offices. We invited the Danish consul general, thinking he could expand on why the Danes are so happy. He said, very simply, that the Danes think people who work all the time are boring. They don’t have time to read a book, see a play, or engage in athletic or charitable activities. So why would you want to have a conversation or spend time with them?

Risky Business

FOCUSING ON HOW LONG YOU are at work rather than what you actually get done is part of a larger set of assumptions about what it takes to do a good job when you are on the job. Bankers and consultants describe their work, often with a note of pride, as “24/7,” meaning that they are “always on.” And ambitious professionals of all varieties are increasingly tethered to their iPhones, responding to emails at all hours of the day or night. We have just seen that switching off will mean you will shine that much brighter

when you turn back on, but the 24/7 mantra is also meant to capture an attitude of complete and total devotion to the task at hand.

In April 2013, women in the financial world got a rude example of the discrimination they face due to this issue. Hedge fund billionaire Paul Tudor Jones told a symposium at the University of Virginia’s McIntire School of Commerce that mothers will never rival men as traders because babies are a “focus killer.” Speaking about one of his own previous associates, he added, to illustrate his point, “As soon as that baby’s lips touched that girl’s bosom, forget it.”

Jones should not be seen as some kind of chauvinist dinosaur; during the firestorm generated by his remarks a number of women spoke up for his overall character and others said they were grateful that he put out in the open what they knew many of their male colleagues thought but would not say.

Moreover, Jones explained his reasoning in a way that encompasses some men and that is open to reasoned challenge. In his view, “macro trading requires a high degree of skill, focus, and repetition,” which is why he also rules out “men going through a divorce,” which he says will automatically reduce their trading results by 10 to 20 percent. Similarly, with respect to women, “The idea that you could think straight for sixty seconds and be able to make a rational decision is impossible, particularly when their kids are involved.”

Here Jones is simply wrong; several studies demonstrate that over the long term women traders outperform their male peers. He is locked into the world of floor traders, who require quick reflexes and intense concentration to make snap decisions in a chaotic environment. That world requires a kind of focus that allows a trader to be hyper-rational, immune from emotional turbulence of any kind. That’s why he equates women with babies with men going through a divorce. He wants to rule out any kind

of emotion that might separate a human being from a machine: the perfectly rational creature we know as *Homo economicus*.

Another name for that kind of focus is tunnel vision, a decidedly bad thing for high-level decision makers. Indeed, in a book entitled *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much*, Princeton psychologist Eldar Shafir and Harvard economist Sendhil Mullainathan have demonstrated how the scarcity of either money or time leads to decisions that are rational in the short term but irrational over the longer term. People under the stress of having to perform when they don't have enough time tend to focus intently on the problem right in front of them, in a way that allows them to meet their immediate deadline but gets them in trouble over the long term. Less stress, on the other hand, means broader vision and better long-term decisions.

People liberated from the stress tunnel may also have a different but equally profitable attitude toward risk. Financial expert and neuroscientist John Coates examined all the data he could find on men and women's trading patterns and identified a difference in the way that men and women trade. He finds that they are equally willing to take risks, but they take them in different ways. Men like to take them quickly, thrilling to the rapid-fire pace of the trading floor (think modern-day battlefield), whereas women prefer to take more time to analyze a security and then make the trade. Coates makes it clear that successful financial traders should be judged by "their call on the market and their understanding of risk once they put on a trade; and there is no reason to believe men are better at this than women. Importantly, the financial world desperately needs more long-term, strategic thinking, and the data indicate that women excel at this."

Coates then, as a man, is not afraid to identify and point out differences between the way men and women behave. For him, different does not mean inferior, it just means different, and quite

possibly better. Assuming that the best way is the way things have always been done is hardly a prescription for success in a fast-changing economy. Men who are focused 24/7 on the present are likely to miss the future.

I started teaching law in 1990, when most law faculties still had very few women. One of the consequences was that even as an assistant professor I was asked to serve on the faculty hiring committee almost every year. That committee, like all faculty committees, needed diverse representation, and schools simply did not have enough women to go around.

Faculty hiring committees at law schools look at hundreds of résumés every year, asking a small number of people to make presentations and give interviews. The committee then deliberates about whether to hire the candidate. Early on in my career, when I served on the committee at the University of Chicago Law School, I recall one of my colleagues telling me after a particularly intense round of deliberations, "Everyone tries to hire himself."

What he meant was that each of us believes that we deserve to be on the faculty, so when we see candidates who have similar career paths to our own, we assume consciously or subconsciously that they deserve to be where we are. Faculty members who followed the traditional path of top grades, the presidency of the law review, and a Supreme Court clerkship not surprisingly look for those credentials as the minimum bar that a prospective candidate must meet. Faculty members who followed an unconventional path, as I did (mixed grades, no clerkship or law review, but a Ph.D. in another discipline and a demonstrated aptitude for scholarship), look for creative thinkers and unusual career profiles.

Hiring patterns like these are hardly restricted to law schools. Perhaps the best way to understand calcified work patterns is to recognize that the white men who got to the top by working around the clock and sacrificing their own time with their loved ones inevitably believe that the people below them who behave as they did must be the best candidates for advancement. They are thus highly suspicious, if not downright disbelieving, of data that show the benefits of working less, working differently, or even taking time out and not working at all for a while.

Joan Williams makes this point harshly but directly: "If you've lived a life where holidays are a nuisance, where you've missed your favorite uncle's funeral and your children's childhoods, in a culture that conflates manly heroism with long hours, it's going to take more than a few regressions to convince you it wasn't really necessary, after all, for your work to devour you."

I'm not sure that it's necessary to look at the many men and far fewer women who have made it to the top and rub their noses in what they have missed. Better to acknowledge the sacrifices they have made as prisoners of their time and cultural norms while asking them to envision a different world for their children. Better still to understand that for the majority of men, working hard *was* exercising their family responsibilities as they understood them and that they developed their own ideas of being a good man accordingly. As the women's movement gained steam, we focused on being allowed to do that work ourselves, helping to make a fetish of income-generating work as a foundation of self-worth.

Now it's up to all of us, women and men alike, to make the next big push toward equality between men and women. We'll have to start by changing how we think.

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