



Feature Articles

Five Tips to Make Work-Life Balance Work for You



By Lynne O. Ingram

Just like diversity and inclusion in the workplace should matter to everyone, so should work-life balance. Work-life balance is a struggle for everyone—not just women or parents. But having my son a year and a half ago made me realize just how much of an issue it is for mothers. Here are 5 tips that have helped me in my quest to become the perfect mother and perfect law firm partner (ha!) over the past year and a half since becoming a new mom:

1. Remember You Aren't Perfect

This should come as no surprise to anyone. So it's surprising how many of us strive for this unattainable goal. Be good. Be darn good. Be great, even. But not perfect. Recognition and, more importantly, acceptance of this obvious fact is crucial. If you are able to make it to the gym six mornings a week, cook healthy dinners for your family every night, and still bill 12 hours each day, then you can probably skip this tip. For the rest of us, we need to figure out a way to work within the parameters of our imperfection, while still striving for greatness. A recent acknowledgement of my imperfection was signing my family up for a food delivery service that brings healthy, all-natural, fully cooked dinners to our door three nights a week. The new running joke in our household is whether my husband or I are going to "cook" (*i.e.* reheat) dinner tonight. It doesn't have the same feel as the home-cooked meals my own stay-at-home mom prepared daily in my youth, but it's better than Chinese delivery and pizza every night. (Friday nights are pizza nights, and we just had Chinese last Monday.)

2. Wherever You Are, Be There

If you are always trying to be a good parent, you will never be fully present at work. If you are always trying to be a good lawyer, you will miss out on so many moments with your family. I try to keep the two separate whenever

possible. When I'm not traveling, I save two to three hours every evening, and spend that time with my son and husband. We eat dinner as a family, watch Jeopardy (yes, we are trivia nerds), and enjoy our son's bedtime routine. Oftentimes, I return to working after he falls asleep. But I find it's easier to do so, after having had that time with my family. Having said that...

3. Work and Life Sometimes Overlap—and That's Okay

Perfect example: I am typing the first draft of this article one handed on my iPhone while I rock my 19 month old back to sleep. And, three weeks ago, I took a conference call while holding my sleeping son in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, where he was admitted for bronchiolitis. My client was aware of the situation, and could not have been more supportive. Our clients understand that we are people, because they are people. Just like we are there for our clients when they lose a parent, are going through a divorce, or are otherwise struggling, they will be there for us. It's a good thing for our clients to see us as real people—and for us to remember that they are, too.

4. Be on the Lookout for Burnout

Merriam-Webster defines burnout as "exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration." A recent Harvard Business Review article states that "companies may be at risk of losing some of their most motivated and hard-working employees not for a lack of engagement, but because of their simultaneous experiences of high stress and burnout symptoms." Seppala, E. and Moeller, J. (2018, February 2). 1 in 5 Highly Engaged Employees Is at Risk of Burnout. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2018/02/1-in-5-highly-engaged-employees-is-at-risk-of-burnout>

Chronic stress and overwork cause burnout, which is detrimental not only to your work life, but also to your home life. Be on the lookout for burnout—not just in yourself, but in your employees and colleagues. You may be on the road to burnout if:

- *Every* day is a bad day.
- Caring about your work or home life seems like a total waste of energy.
- You're exhausted all the time.
- The majority of your day is spent on tasks you find either mind-numbingly dull or overwhelming.
- You feel like nothing you do makes a difference or is appreciated.

Smith, M., Segal, J., Robinson, L., and Segal, R. (2018, February). *Burnout Prevention And Treatment*. Retrieved from <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/burnout-prevention-and-recovery.htm>

If you see these signs in yourself, reach out for support. Evaluate how you can reduce stress in your job and at home. Exercise. Get the sleep your body needs to refuel. Which brings me to my last tip...

5. There Is Not One Right Way

You know what works and what doesn't work—for you, your family, and your job—better than anyone else. Read articles. Listen to podcasts. Meditate. Do none of those things. Take advice if you find it to be helpful. Leave advice if it's counterproductive to your goals. Thanks to the Internet, information overload is a fact of life. You can quickly fall down the Google rabbit hole, never to be seen again. My idea to protect two to three hours every evening for dinner, *Jeopardy*, and bedtime may be a nonstarter for you—so don't do it. You may think I'm an awful mother for being on a conference call while I'm with my sick kid in the hospital—but it works for me. Find what works for you and do that, because a perfectly imperfect work-life balance is something we should all embrace.

Lynne Ingram is a member of Campbell Campbell Edwards & Conroy in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, where she defends manufacturers, contractors, and property owners in complex civil litigation matters throughout the country, from inception through mediation and trial. Prior to entering private practice, Lynne was an ADA in Philadelphia, where she tried over 40 felony jury trials. Lynne is the co-chair of her firm's Diversity Committee, active in DRI, and volunteers at her local hospital's NICU.