

Work-Life Balance: Research Findings
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1. **“Balance” is really the wrong word. Relationships between work and nonwork life are never static and rarely in equilibrium. “Navigation” might be a better metaphor.**
2. **Participation in multiple roles (e.g., employment, parenthood, intimate relationships) brings significant benefits, in addition to whatever challenges come along. Work and nonwork life enhance each other in significant and meaningful ways.**
3. **Conflict between work and nonwork life is associated with a long list of negative outcomes, including compromised personal well-being and work outcomes. The causal chain may be somewhat circular – compromised well-being can lead to perceptions of more conflict.**
4. **Work-to-family conflict appears to be more corrosive than family-to-work conflict, but the two are typically correlated. Conflict is less strongly related to work hours than it is to perceived pressure. Hours and pressure are only moderately correlated.**
5. **Decades of research have shown that having an employed mother (as opposed to a homemaker mother) predicts very little about children’s development or well-being.**
6. **Across the labor force, much of the gender gap in wages appears to be explained by a gap that disadvantages mothers and people who do ‘care’ work.**
7. **Both formal policies and informal practices that support workers’ work-family issues are perceived as helpful, but informal practices appear to explain more variability in worker outcomes. Supervisor support emerges in many studies as a key variable.**
8. **On average, men’s behavior at home has changed far less than women’s behavior at work. Men’s involvement with their children has substantially increased in recent decades, however, and women’s involvement in housework has declined. The average child today spends more time with his or her parents than his or her counterpart in 1965.**
9. **Both individuals and jobs vary in terms of ‘boundary permeability.’ Some jobs have very rigid inflexible boundaries. Some individuals have a very difficult time ‘spanning boundaries.’ Mismatches between individuals and jobs can exacerbate conflict between work and nonwork life.**

The insights shared here are inspired by the accumulated knowledge in articles nominated for the Rosabeth Moss Kanter Award for Excellence in Work-Family Research, an international award offered by the Center for Families at Purdue University and the Boston College Center for Work and Family, and sponsored by the Alliance for Work/Life Progress. For more information about these articles, please go to:

http://www.cfs.purdue.edu/cff/projects/current_projects/kanter_award/kanter_publication.html

So, what is a woman (or a man) to do? Insights from a personal journey:

1. At Purdue, there are few if any substitutes for traditional accomplishments. If it can't show up on your vitae, ask carefully whether it is worth doing now (you can always do it later). Job #1 is keeping your job. Get advice.
2. Academic jobs are very difficult to bound – they easily flow into all aspects of your life if you let them. If you are not a 'permeable boundaries' kind of person, it may be helpful to create artificial boundary structures that will reduce your feelings of tension. Child care arrangements are sometimes very helpful in this regard.
3. Start as you mean to go on. In other words, try not to postpone many aspects of your life 'until you get tenure,' or 'until your next promotion,' because by then your professional life will have built up so much momentum it will be hard to slow down. If your long-term goal is to go away for all of July, start doing that as soon as you can. Your colleagues and students will then get used to it and you won't have to fight for it all the time.
4. Don't be a martyr, at home or at work. At work, quell most – but maybe not all – your urges to take things on without being asked in the hope that there will be a big gratitude payoff. It is more important to excel in some things than others – learn the difference. At home, resist the scripts that lead you to take on more than what is fair. Learn to adjust to lower standards, your partner's way of doing things, or having others do things that you could do better.
5. Don't wait for time to free up to do the things that feed your soul. Structure in the time for your soul and other things will flow around it. There are more 'meaningless' hours in our lives than we realize, and that time can be reallocated.
6. Learn to be productive in small chunks of time. The big chunks are increasingly hard to find as your career and family life progress.