Improving Work-Life Satisfaction

Mikel “Micky” Holcomb
Physics Department, WVU
Mother of 2 kids (Age 5 and 7)
Funded by NSF, DOE, ACS

(ALICE, DO YOU HAVE ANY VALUABLE CAREER ADVICE?
WORK SO HARD THAT IT DESTROYS YOUR HEALTH AND CROWDS OUT ANY CHANCE OF HAVING A PERSONAL LIFE.
WOULDN'T THAT MAKE ME... UNHAPPY? YOU DIDN'T ASK FOR HAPPINESS ADVICE.

(Based on materials from a partnership between AWIS & the Elsevier Foundation)
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WORK SO HARD THAT IT DESTROYS YOUR HEALTH AND CROWDS OUT ANY CHANCE OF HAVING A PERSONAL LIFE.

DON'T YOU DARE ASK FOR UNHAPPY ADVICE.

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“Ground Rules” & Housekeeping

• Respect each other
• Silence and put away cellphones
• Maintain confidentiality

“Absorb what is useful, reject what is useless, add what is specifically your own”
Bruce Lee
“What makes work-life satisfaction so challenging?”
Work-Life balance goals will fluctuate throughout your life, throughout the year and sometimes throughout the day!

When both hit simultaneously, need coping strategies!
Defining Satisfaction

It is different for every person.

• Varies over time
• Not just about women
• Not just about children/parents
• Finding time for life outside of work (rafting)
• Tension between demands (teaching vs research)
• Making choices that match your values and priorities (ex. You value teaching, but not rewarded for it OR opposite)
Work-Life Satisfaction begins with awareness:

- Your situation and the systems in which you live and work
- Resources available to you
- Your strengths and weaknesses
- Your values/priorities
- Your current level of work-life satisfaction and your work-life challenges

What is satisfaction to you? Not always easy to identify the answer.
EXERCISE:
80th Birthday Tribute
Participant Debrief

What are the values and priorities that are most meaningful to you, as evidenced by your toast?
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- Cultivate a strong support system
- Recharge your batteries
- Exercise your NO!
- Plan and prioritize
- Shift your mindset ("mental toughness")
- Ask for what you want and need
- Establish guilt-free boundaries

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YOUR NETWORK, YOUR RESOURCE, YOUR VOICE
Work-Life Satisfaction begins with awareness:

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Cultivate a strong support system
Who do you ask for advice?

Topics might include:

Classes
Research
Career Planning
Service
Most People Don’t Ask for Help from Enough People!

- Friends and Family
- Online Resources
- Housecleaning or Neighborhood Teenagers
- Self Analysis
- Networking
- Mentoring
- Peers

Who are two people you could add to your support system?
What are important qualities in a mentor?

**Dilbert**

**Alice:** Alice, do you have any valuable career advice?

**Dilbert:** Work so hard that it destroys your health and crowds out any chance of having a personal life.

**Alice:** Wouldn't that make me... unhappy? You didn't ask for happiness advice.
What are important qualities in a mentor?
What are important qualities in a mentee?

The Role of a Mentee

• Seek advice, not a supervisor who directs actions.
• Synthesize lessons learned from many mentors – become your own person.
• Come prepared (what do you want, strengths, weaknesses)

Example: Public Speaking
How do you ask someone to mentor you?

What’s the worst they can say?
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Cultivate a strong support system

Ask for what you want and need

Why is this difficult?
What You Need: Discussion/Activity

• Has anyone asked for something they need recently? Wish you had?

• Framing is important: If you provide me with this resource, I can ....
  – These are the great things I will do with that resource
    • How does it benefit the organization: relate mission, strategic plan of university, college, department
    • Deliverables?
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Plan and prioritize
Ask for what you want and need
Priorities/Values

Holding our deeply held values and priorities in our consciousness provides a “compass” for making important decisions.
Your Weekly Planning Meeting

Remember the goal isn’t PERFECTION

Weekly, review, reflect, celebrate successes and plan for the coming week

Choose your actions based on your plan

Determine what **must** be done each week and each day

Leave time open for unexpected “urgent and important” issues

Should align with personal and professional priorities and goals
Make a Schedule
Does it align with how you are ranked?

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<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussions with Research Students and Collaborators</td>
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<td>4 - 5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The more specific your tasks can be, the better!
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Cultivate a strong support system

Exercise your NO!

Plan and prioritize

Comics:

-I can’t do your urgent task because I’m on deadline for my boss.
-I can’t meet your deadline because I have an urgent task from a co-worker.
-I finally figured out the whole “work-life balance” thing.
5 Questions to Ask When You Are Considering Saying Yes:

1. Must this be **DONE?**
   (Who says?)
5 Questions to Ask When You Are Considering Saying Yes:

2. Must this be done BY ME?
   (If not me, then who?)
Only if it applies to all three
5 Questions to Ask When You Are Considering Saying Yes:

3. Must this be done RIGHT NOW?
5 Questions to Ask When You Are Considering Saying Yes:

4. Must this be done **THIS WAY**? (Why?)
5 Questions to Ask When You Are Considering Saying Yes:

5. If I say yes to this, what am I saying no to?
Say **NO** by saying **YES**: 

“**Here’s what I can do...**”

from Judy Feld, AWIS coach
Exercise your “No”
Discussion/Activity

• Think of something you have been asked to do recently (ex: chair a committee, organize a meeting) and ask yourself these 5 Questions (use handout)
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Exercise your NO!

Plan and prioritize

Shift your mindset ("mental toughness")

Ask for what you want and need
Mindset Shift: Discussion/Activity

• What is something that you find stressful or complicated? (e.g., public speaking, writing)
• Discuss ways to shift your mindset. (e.g., practice, find more opportunities to do it)
• Form a group of like-minded peers with which to practice
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Establish guilt-free boundaries

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Life Balance and Career in Context

- career
- personal life
- community

LIFE WORK

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Guilt-free Boundaries: Discussion

• Phone example

• Email example:
  – How often do you check your email?
  – How often do you need to check your email?
  – Boundary: If critical can call
Guilt-free Boundaries: Discussion

• Vacations
• Work travel
• Double dipping vs. separation
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How do you recharge your batteries?
Pick a few strategies to try and experiment to find out what helps you the most!

Cultivate a strong support system

Recharge your batteries

Exercise your NO!

Plan and prioritize

Ask for what you want and need

Establish guilt-free boundaries

Shift your mindset ("mental toughness")

Use your experimental skills to build a happier life!

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Work-Life
Satisfaction

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The world became a more beautiful place