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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“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

AWIS

ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE
YOUR NETWORK, YOUR RESOURCE, YOUR VOICE
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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?
What are important qualities in a mentor?
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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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

Cultivate a strong support system
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**

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

**Choose your actions based on your plan**

**Should align with personal and professional priorities and goals**

**Leave time open for unexpected “urgent and important” issues**

Remember the goal isn’t perfection.
# Make a Schedule

Does it align with how you are ranked?

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>&lt;10:30</td>
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<td>Lunch and Email</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 - 4</td>
<td>Discussions with Research Students and Collaborators</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 - 5</td>
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<td>Office Hours</td>
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<td>Email &amp; Miscellaneous</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The more specific your tasks can be, the better!
Work-Life Satisfaction
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Your values/priorities

Cultivate a strong support system

Exercise your NO!

Plan and prioritize

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

My Interests

My Skills

My Reward

Delegate

Delegate

Delegate

YES!
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?)

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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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Cultivate a strong support system

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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Cultivate a strong support system
Exercise your NO!
Plan and prioritize
Shift your mindset ("mental toughness")
Ask for what you want and need
Establish guilt-free boundaries
Life Balance and Career in Context

- Career
- Personal Life
- Community
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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- 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
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

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Use your experimental skills to build a happier life!
The world became a more beautiful place.