

Your Work, Your Life ... Your Way

7 Keys to Work–Life Balance

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Author's Note: The names and details of the case studies provided in the book have been changed to respect the confidentiality of the coaching relationships.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009910552
ISBN: 978-0-9842474-0-0

Printed in the United States of America
First Edition

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Introduction

How often have you said, “My work is killing me!” or “If I only had time, I’d ...?” How often have your work responsibilities pulled you away or prevented you from engaging in a more personally, emotionally, spiritually, socially, or [you-fill-in-the-blank] rewarding experience? For most people, the time spent on the work side of the equation is much greater than the time spent enjoying other meaningful endeavors. This is often the catalyst for much stress, discomfort, and maybe even outright anger.

As a career and personal coach, I have worked with hundreds of clients, supporting them in designing more satisfying professional and personal lives. One of the major concerns with almost all of my clients, regardless of what has brought them to work with me, is the desire to create a more balanced mixture of the time they spend working and the time they spend not working. If you feel like many of my clients do—overwhelmed or bothered by a less-than-desirable mix of work and life, you are not alone.

At times, we all make sacrifices in order to uphold our work commitments or to advance professionally. In fact, as you will discover, this book does not treat working a little extra as a situation that is inherently problematic—as long as you are making

deliberate choices about how much you work (and why) and as long as you are comfortable with these choices. Instead, this book will help you identify your own preferred mix of work and life, which may involve more work at certain times in your life than at other times.

That being said, you may have come to this book with some interest in bringing more nonwork activities into your life or simply reducing the amount of time and energy you spend at work or even just diminishing the degree of stress your work causes you. As a result, this book will support you in identifying and addressing the actions you take around your professional commitments that infringe on all the other things that are important to you.

Why Am I Writing This Book?

I am writing this book to share the knowledge I have gained from helping individuals identify how their work does not work for them, which often impacts these individuals' overall satisfaction with the balance in their lives between professional and nonprofessional activities.

In my work with clients, I have seen the same work–life balance themes arise time after time, which has ultimately led me to identify 7 common barriers to work–life balance and 7 “keys” that can be used to navigate past these barriers. I have identified these 7 barriers—and 7 keys to navigating them—over years of working with high-achieving professionals who work a lot and want a change.

It is these 7 barriers and keys that are explored in this book. In addition, this book will feature some of the very

same “fieldwork” I provide to my clients everyday—concrete exercises and activities to support you in creating new ways of operating as an effective professional and a satisfied hobbyist, volunteer, parent, soccer coach, activist, artist ... this list goes on and on and will be personalized by you—in sum, to improve your work–life balance and live your life *on your own terms*.

My hope as you read this book and invest time in doing the fieldwork exercises is that you will develop a new perspective that empowers you to call the shots in your work and life choices. No longer will you be driven by external forces that do not have your best interests in mind. No longer will you assume that there is only one way to work. No longer will you feel the struggle of never having enough ... time, energy, sleep, or choices. Again, you get to “fill in the blank.”

As you notice, you get to “fill in the blank” a lot. It is really up to you on how to design your work and your life—so that they work for you—and my intentions in this book are to guide you in that process. I believe that too many of us feel like we do not have control over our own lives, and I am writing this book to help liberate readers from the idea that they have to live their lives on someone else’s terms.

Why Read This Book?

You might also be wondering why you should read this particular book when there are several others on the topic of work–life balance floating around the market. So let’s look at what this book has to offer and why it might be special and worth your time.

1. *This book uses a hands-on approach that leads to real change.* Reading this book will not only help you to shift your *thinking* about work–life balance, but it will also help shift your way of *acting and interacting* (i.e., your way of behaving). In particular, the many practical exercises included in the book will aid you in translating new thoughts about work–life balance into action. In other words, this book will help you see real results!
2. *This book offers a baby-step approach that makes change doable, not overwhelming.* This book includes all the fundamental steps and exercises I use with clients to help them improve their work–life balance. As you will discover, each chapter is broken down into a series of small, straightforward steps (or exercises) that you can engage in at your own pace to improve your work–life balance bit by bit, over time. This book thus aims to make the change process both manageable and achievable.
3. *The guidance provided in this book is very concrete, solution-oriented, and future-directed so you don't just think about issues, you actually work through them.* Unlike therapeutic approaches, which often have you reflecting on your past to gain a philosophical understanding of why you are the way you are, this book (true to the coaching model) has you focusing on the present and the future. The book's approach also keeps things concrete, encouraging you to identify clear problems that can be solved along with accompanying solutions that are palatable—maybe even exciting—to you. Again, this will help you make tangible changes to your work–life mix.

4. *This book allows you to customize work–life balance to meet your personal priorities and values (not someone else’s).* This book encourages you to let go of outside pressure to give attention to some areas of your life more than others and, instead, to design a life that is reflective of what matters most to you.
5. *This book gives you permission to be unbalanced sometimes!* The last thing you need is pressure to be balanced, on top of all the other pressures you likely face day-to-day. This book puts forth a flexible approach that acknowledges that finding balance is an ongoing journey that sometimes involves taking purposeful detours, pit stops, and breaks along the way.

Through a customized, flexible, and hands-on approach that is built on baby steps and aimed at using a solution-oriented approach, this book serves as a sort of “coach-in-a-box”—practical, comprehensive support for overcoming your barriers to work–life balance and for putting significant keys to work–life balance into practice. Although you can benefit from supplementing your efforts by enlisting the help of a real, live person—such as a coach, a mentor, or a friend on a similar journey—this book will nonetheless provide you with a useful guide to making lasting and satisfying changes to your work–life balance.

Work–Life Balance Defined

Since this book focuses on the concept of work–life balance, I would like to define what I mean by this term. Interestingly, when discussing work–life balance with my clients and asking

many groups of people what work–life balance means to them, I always receive a varied range of answers. For some, it is a feeling of peacefulness around how they operate; for others, it is the ability to accomplish all that they want. For me, it is having the flexibility to make work and life choices that are best for my current situation without worry. For my husband, it is having enough time at home with our son while enjoying his work, hobbies, and friends. When I ask an audience at a presentation this question, I get unique answers from each person. Try it yourself—ask a group of friends—what is work–life balance? My hunch is that you will get a great variety of answers.

For the purposes of this book, I will be using the following definition to represent what I mean by *work–life balance*. When I mention the term in this book, I am referring to your more desired approach to integrating your work and non-work commitments, responsibilities, and activities. The term is also meant to describe an ideal state or situation in which your personal priorities have the space and energy needed to be addressed while also allowing for work requirements, accomplishments, and desires.

On the Term *Work–Life Balance*

When I started creating this material for the book, *work–life balance* was the widely used and accepted terminology. Recently, however, the term's use has been questioned.

As I will discuss later in this *Introduction*, balance as a state is very difficult to attain and almost impossible to maintain. Some people writing about this topic are concerned that using the phrase *work–life balance* sets people up for failure by implying that balance can be captured or permanently attained. In response to this concern, a few

other terms have been coined to better capture this more desired process or state that leads to greater satisfaction in both personal and professional realms.

As I began the second round of edits for this book, I was greatly concerned as to whether I needed to find a more appropriate and manageable term beside *work–life balance* to use in the book and the book's title. I did a lot of research, spoke with a wide array of professionals who work in fields that regularly address work–life issues, and started discussions with anyone who was willing to talk. I was certain that the term *work–life balance* was unattainable, inappropriate, and passé and that I *must* find or coin a new phrase to define this very real struggle with which so many people grapple regularly.

As a result, I conducted extensive market research to help select from two new terms I had generated with the help of a small focus group: *work–life satisfaction* and *work–life fulfillment*. These terms seemed much more appropriate, attainable, personal, and positive than simply *work–life balance*. I was on my way to a new and much improved term that would empower my readers, students, and clients.

Yet, after distributing a survey to 500 people, excitedly awaiting the survey responses, and then reading through the results, what I was truly hoping for did not actually happen. My hope was that a large percentage of the survey respondents would strongly prefer one of my focus group phrases and it would be an easy and obvious switch to a new title and term throughout the book. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Instead, the preference between the two pre-defined phrases was almost equal. So, I did not easily have a new title or a new phrase to “brand.”

Although I did not get my hoped-for “silver bullet,” I did get so much more. Generous survey respondents poured out their thoughts, feelings, and creativity. At least thirty phrases were shared, including *work–life synergy*, *life optimization*, *work–life management*, *work–life alignment*, *life/work satisfaction*, *work–life fusion*, *work–life integration*, and *work–life flow*.

In response to “my” two terms, there were many unique perspectives. People loved and hated each phrase. A group also

strongly preferred *work-life balance* as they felt it was “the” term that people understood—the common, most used, and most understood phrase for what I wanted to describe. As one respondent said, “a pig with lipstick is still a pig”—meaning, no matter what I decided to call the book or which phrase to use throughout it, the term *work-life balance* would be most identifiable and understandable by the largest audience.

So, with these wise words, and thirty-three pages of passionate feedback, I have decided to keep the term *work-life balance* in the title and throughout the book.

Since for the purposes of this book I am defining work-life balance generically—as a more desired approach to integrating your work and nonwork commitments, responsibilities, and activities—I would like to offer the following caveat for you to remember each time you read the phrase *work-life balance*. Please think of *work-life balance* as a shorthand way to represent the many unique perspectives that each person has when working and struggling with the often crazy mix of time, commitments, priorities, and responsibilities that make up one’s professional and personal life. No matter what definition represents the concept best for you, the end goal of this book is this: that you will be empowered by the tools, insights, and actions included in this book to ultimately make choices that allow your work-life balance to be uniquely, personally, and optimally defined and implemented by you.

The Myths of Work–Life Balance

The phrase *work-life balance* is heard often in the media with magazines, talk shows, and self-help professionals offering solutions on how to “get it.” Yet, this approach often does a

great disservice to all of us as it falsely assumes that work–life balance is an end state—something that you can accomplish and then maintain forever. With all due respect—you are never going to get there!

Now that I have stated the truth in its bluntest form, I will refine that point a bit. What I mean to say is that while you might achieve moments or even days of balance, balance is not something you are likely to experience on an absolute or permanent basis. Work–life balance is not so much a steady state to be attained, captured, nailed down, or maintained; instead, it is more of a state to be attempted, approached, or approximated. You might even think of it as a dance, with a few steps in one direction and a few steps in another, all circling around your ideal picture of work–life balance.

To understand this concept more fully, let's look at balance in general. Imagine the following three things: a seesaw (or teeter–totter), a tightrope walker, and a spinning top. When you think of these three things, balance may be what you think they have in common—but let's examine them more closely. In actuality, a seesaw never actually *achieves* balance. It is constantly *moving* in response to the energy and pressure each rider applies. A tightrope walker may look balanced, but she never stops, is always adjusting the pole she is carrying and her center of gravity, and is working very hard to appear somewhat stable. One slip, and she falls. Finally, there is the spinning top. Again, it looks balanced, but only when it is moving quickly. As the top slows down, it begins to wobble, then falls over and stops.

These metaphors—a seesaw, a spinning top, and a tightrope walker—point to one of the greatest myths of work–life balance. Although work–life balance is often envisioned as some

end state to be fully achieved and then maintained permanently (the myth!), in fact, work–life balance is a continual journey that never stops. Like the seesaw and spinning top that both move with fluidity for a time when the right actions are applied, you too can experience the satisfying journey of enjoying more balance in your life. Nonetheless, it is helpful to realize that the journey will involve some hard work and continual tweaking—as is the case for the tightrope walker. Sometimes you might even fall off the high wire or choose to jump. Yet, the good news is that you can always begin the process of balancing once again, when you are ready.

So, the first myth relevant to this book is that work–life balance is an end state to be achieved. In reality, work–life balance is a continual journey in which to be engaged—a process of balancing, working, tweaking, adjusting, maybe falling down, climbing up again, and then reengaging.

There is another important work–life balance myth to consider, too. *This second myth is that work–life balance has a single definition—that it looks and feels the same to each of us.* Balance does not necessarily mean working only forty hours a week, leaving the office by 5 p.m. every night, being at your child’s every soccer game, having time to nurture your hobby, and sleeping eight hours every night. It may mean this, but it is going to mean something different for everyone reading this book and for everyone you know.

As I mentioned earlier in this *Introduction*, each of us actually has our own personal definition of work–life balance. Once we give ourselves permission to embrace this reality, it can be both liberating and empowering . . . because we become free to make choices based on what we want for ourselves, not what we feel

pressured to pursue on the basis of other people's opinions or society's preferences.

For some individuals, ideal work–life balance involves spending a good amount of one's time on professional endeavors; for others, ideal work–life balance involves finding a way to focus mostly on endeavors outside of the professional domain, such as raising children. For others, ideal work–life balance involves finding a more equal mix of professional and personal activities, in which both domains are valued and one does not predominate over the other. And, of course, some people do not even think of their ideal work–life balance in terms of how much time they spend in the professional or the personal domain; instead, they describe their ideal balance in terms of the accomplishments that are most important to them, the kind of “down time” they hope to have, or the feelings they want to experience on an everyday basis.

How you define and frame your ideal work–life balance will be entirely up to you.

Yet, it can be easy to fall into the trap of feeling guilty about your own version of work–life balance. On top of struggling to find balance, you might also find yourself thinking critical thoughts of your personal definition of balance! That is not only unfair to yourself, it is also counterproductive to the process. Ideally, you will let go of any self-doubt you have about your own personal version of ideal work–life balance, and you will give yourself permission as you read this book to embrace this personalized version of what seems right to you. The fieldwork throughout the book will also encourage you to do so.

So, the myths of work–life balance are two-fold: that there is *one* right definition of work–life balance in which each of us

needs to fit and that work–life balance is a *destination* at which we eventually arrive and stay—a sort of work–life balance nirvana.

In light of these myths, my goal in this book is to enable you to reframe work–life balance in a much more personal and manageable way. I aim to acknowledge the very personal nature of work–life balance as well as to empower you to create a custom work–life mix that works for you. I also attempt to be honest about the fact that the process of approaching balance requires work and is ongoing. This last point is also meant to take some pressure off of you. Sometimes you will not feel balanced, and that is okay!

Work–Life Balance Is a Journey ...

Thus, work–life balance is a journey toward a destination that you will approach or even “visit” from time to time but to which you most likely will not indefinitely remain.

On this journey toward work–life balance, think of your self-knowledge and your intuition as an internal compass that can tell you when you are veering far off the path or when you are getting closer. This book will encourage you to dig out your compass and learn to trust it.

Admittedly, you will constantly have to readjust your route when you hit unplanned roadblocks, potholes, detours, and traffic jams. You will also experience occasional short cuts, enjoy scenic routes, and be aided by bridges. At times, you will be off the beaten path enjoying the view and at other times you will be in an express lane, missing everything you are passing by. The key to managing the journey is not getting too caught up at where you are any one moment. Over time, whether it

is an hour, a day, a week, or a year, you can make choices that move you closer to what balance means to you, accepting that at any one time, there may be instances when things are very far from your ideal.

The goal of this book is to help you become aware of the road hazards you will face, point out more effective routes, show you how to use your own work–life balance compass, and invite you to make choices that put you in a faster lane on your journey in your desired direction.

As mentioned earlier in this *Introduction*, I have observed 7 barriers—or consistent challenges—that often get in the way of achieving a more sane, manageable, and even desirable mix of life and work time commitments and choices. Seven of this book’s nine chapters will explore these barriers, help you identify whether they are inhibiting your own journey toward work–life balance, and, if so, work to move past or through these barriers. This last piece is where the 7 keys—or tools for navigating beyond the barriers—come into play.

The 7 keys are solution-oriented tools that you can use to go around, over, under, or through the barriers and continue on your journey toward work–life balance.

If you look up the word *key* in the dictionary, you will find several meanings. The most obvious, perhaps, is the definition of a key as a metal tool used to gain entrance to something. This matches one of the ways that the 7 keys in this book function. Once you get ahold of one of these “keys,” you are likely to discover that what was once a barrier can become simply a door to be unlocked. Once through it, you can continue on your way toward greater work–life balance.

On the other hand, by *7 keys* I am also referring to keys as “something that gives an . . . identification or provides a solution” as in “the key to a riddle” (*Merriam-Webster Online*). Like the answer key that helps you solve a crossword puzzle or a legend that helps you decipher a map, the 7 keys together serve as a sort of code-breaker for the barriers through which you need to navigate to move toward your desired work–life balance. Instead of seeing these barriers as insurmountable obstacles that cannot be overcome, the keys provide you with tools for navigating past the barriers, much like a road map.

Knowing what gets in the way of your desired work–life balance—that is, identifying the barriers—is the first step in changing your work–life balance to a more preferable state. Once you understand the barriers that are in your way, you will be able to craft new paths and choices to move you further along your desired route—using the keys described and the fieldwork exercises presented.

How to Use This Book

As you can see by the description of work–life balance thus far, how balance looks in practice is a very personal choice. What works for you will likely be very different from what works for your best friend, brother or sister, boss, or the stranger next to you on the bus. As work–life balance is personal, so is how you might use this book.

The 7 keys and barriers that follow encompass facets of your life that are personal and professional. They also include situations that impact you externally as well as perspectives that affect you internally. The fieldwork exercises that appear in

each chapter are also varied. Some fieldwork requires observation, some requires reflection, and some requires action.

If you are comfortable working in a linear fashion, I recommend that you go through the keys in order, as the book was written. If you come across a key that does not feel relevant to you, skim through the rest of the chapter and start the next. Note that some of the individual pieces of fieldwork may be very useful even if the relevant barrier is not a primary challenge for you. And, as there is some overlap and connection among multiple barriers, if you read each chapter, you may become aware of new relationships and solutions to challenges and roadblocks that you did not think were connected.

If working through the book in order does not feel right to you, focus on the keys that seem most relevant to your own journey toward work–life balance. Even so, within a given chapter, do conduct the fieldwork exercises in the order in which they appear, rather than skipping ahead: The fieldwork exercises are meant to build on each other as well as on the earlier text in the chapter.

If you choose to skip around rather than read the book in a linear fashion, I still encourage you not to skip the chapter entitled *Key 5 – Reprioritize Your Values*. People who are dissatisfied with their current work–life balance often find that some incompatibility exists between or among their values. This chapter will help you gain insight into your values and why they matter in regard to work–life balance. This chapter will also engage you in fieldwork exercises that help you more clearly define your values and therefore what matters most to you. I believe this key’s fieldwork is particularly important and very useful to everyone; my clients who have focused on this key tend to agree.

A Guide to Doing the Fieldwork

Throughout this book, you will be asked to complete exercises and answer questions while you are reading the book. I refer to these parts of each chapter as *fieldwork*, and you will notice them in the text by a little graphic that says *Fieldwork*. Each fieldwork exercise requires some activity or observation in the context of your work and your life. To get the most out of this book and the concepts being shared, do the work!! As silly as this sounds, change requires change . . . which means not only thinking about something differently but also *doing* something differently than you are doing right now.

The start of making changes to the way you work and the way you live your life is marked with an initial action step: In this case, you are making the commitment to read this book, answer questions, and do the fieldwork thoroughly for each key. Change begins with commitment. Are you ready? If so, here are my recommendations for getting the most out of this book.

Step #1: Establish a Dedicated Place to Do the Work in This Book

As you begin this process, decide on one or two locations where you will work on your fieldwork and think about the choices and changes you will be making. Make it a place where there will be no (or, at least, very few) disruptions or distractions, and a place that feels like it is your own space: maybe a quiet coffee shop, your local library, or a comfortable chair in a less-trafficked room in your home. Also, set aside either a file in your computer or a notebook or journal as a private place to commit the work and any additional thoughts or ideas to paper or computer screen. Alternatively, consider picking up a copy of *7 Keys Workbook and Journal*, a special work space I have created to accompany this book (available online at www.7KeysToWorkLifeBalance.com). Throughout the book, as you come upon fieldwork exercises, I will refer you to turn to “*your 7 Keys Workbook and Journal* or other dedicated work space.” By *dedicated work space*, I am referring to whatever notebook, journal,

or computer file you have selected as your spot for capturing the work in which you engage for this book. You can use your dedicated work space to complete the fieldwork exercises and to record your thoughts, ideas, brainstorming, and visions of the future. It is important to actually write or type the answers to each of the fieldwork exercises so that you can take them from your head and commit them to paper or a saved computer file. There is power in making your ideas and plans concrete.

Step #2: Make the Time

I often hear from new participants in my 7 Barriers/7 Keys programs a frequent and similar concern: “I am already too busy and overwhelmed . . . how am I going to do anything for this class?” This concern would be reasonable if you were about to add more and more to your plate without removing or reshaping what was already there, but this will not be the case. I want to encourage you and challenge you to fully take the plunge, as most of these activities require only a small amount of time—often only a few additional minutes of thinking, observing, brainstorming, imagining, and creating, all with the intention of designing your work and your life, your way. As you are beginning to dive into this book, look at your calendar and actually schedule time to engage in your journey. The way you choose to schedule this time will be unique to you—maybe an hour a week, fifteen minutes each morning, or a chunk of time Sunday evenings to concentrate on this process and your plans to implement, experiment, and invest in meaningful change.

Step #3: Enlist the Support of Others

There is even more power in these exercises when you share your answers with someone else. This could be a friend, trusted colleague, a professional coach, or others with similar desires to foster greater work–life balance. With whomever you choose to share, be sure the person understands that you want and need support and encouragement for each step of this journey.

In addition to the fieldwork exercises in each chapter, note that if you have a copy of the *7 Keys Workbook and Journal*, you will be able to access a list of reflection questions, entitled *Going Deeper*. These questions will provide you with an opportunity to reflect even further on the guidance offered in the book chapter, how it applies to you, and where you are on your journey to putting that key or guidance into practice. In addition to the actual *Going Deeper* questions, ample space is provided in the workbook/journal for you to write down your answers to these reflection questions.

If you would like to deepen or supplement your learning from this book, you may also want to refer to the *List of Resources for Learning More* provided in the Appendix at the back of this book. This list contains a handful of books and websites you can check out to learn more about putting the guidance from this book into practice.

At the end of each chapter, you will see a section entitled *Postcard from the Road*. This section will highlight the key points of the chapter, in order to simplify the integration of awareness of the key and remediation of the barrier. The intention of these reminders is to provide you with simple statements to keep you focused on making small changes that will eventually lead to significant impact.

Finally, when you begin any new journey, it is helpful to consult a map; and, if you ever should feel lost during your journey, a road map will also help you get your bearings—detecting where you are, confirming your desired destination, and tracing the best route to get there. This metaphor certainly applies to your journey toward improved work–life balance. As a result, this book begins with a brief but significant chapter

called *A Road Map for the Journey: How Satisfied Are You?* That chapter—and the fieldwork exercises within it—are an essential part of using this book and getting real results in your efforts toward more preferable work–life balance. In particular, you will have an opportunity in that chapter to assess your *current* satisfaction level with your work–life balance and then to describe your *ideal* work–life balance. In the process, you will be plotting where you are on your journey right now in comparison to where you would like to be heading.

Now that you have a clearer understanding of this book’s content, what is meant by work–life balance, and how to use this book for maximum benefit, let’s begin your journey toward enhanced work–life balance!

A Road Map for the Journey: How Satisfied Are You?

As mentioned in the *Introduction*, your efforts to cultivate work–life balance will involve a *journey* toward your desired work–life picture. When you begin any journey toward a new place, it always helps to know your starting point so you can map a desired route toward your hoped-for destination. Thus, this short but fundamental chapter of the book will engage you in two hands-on exercises for identifying your current state of work–life balance satisfaction (your starting point) and then identifying your desired state of work–life balance (your hoped-for destination). If you think of yourself as having an internal compass and a direction toward which you would like to turn, this chapter will help you get your bearings.

Are You Satisfied With Your Current Work–Life Balance?

Current State of Your Work–Life Satisfaction

To map your starting point on this journey, you can complete the following fieldwork exercise. Doing so will help you gain clarity

regarding your level of satisfaction with your current work–life balance situation. (Note that you will also be revisiting this exercise again at the end of the book—and can check in with it throughout the book—to track whether you are moving in your desired direction.)



Identify Your Current Work–Life Balance

Satisfaction: Although you can conduct this exercise directly in this book, you may also prefer to take out your *7 Keys Workbook and Journal* or other dedicated work space (journal, notebook, computer file) and complete this exercise there. For this first exercise, you will determine your “Work–Life Balance Satisfaction Level.” To do so, select a number between 1 and 10 that rates how satisfied you are with your work–life balance situation right now, with 10 being completely satisfied with the mix of things in your work and life (and therefore you do not need to be reading this book!) and 1 being complete dissatisfaction—you have *no life* in the mix and do not see any way out.

As you think about your Work–Life Balance Satisfaction Level, some things to consider include how satisfied you are with:

- number of hours you work
- level of stress related to work
- time with family/friends
- your ability to explore your hobbies/interests
- your level of volunteering for your community
- your ability to relax
- your quantity and quality of sleep
- your level of accomplishment
- feeling that you are living your life as you want.

After you have considered these different areas of satisfaction, write down the number that best represents your satisfaction level with your current work-life balance situation.

In addition to this specific number, I would also like you to create a concise descriptor of how you feel about your current work—life balance situation. How satisfied are you? Use three words or less to describe how you feel in this regard. For example, you might write ...

Work–Life Balance Satisfaction Level	Descriptor of How I Feel About My Current Work–Life Balance Situation
3	overwhelmed, wiped-out
4	stressed and tired
7	having some fun
2	need change now
9	loving life

The descriptor needs to be concise so you have a clear definition of your current satisfaction with the situation, but other than that, there is no correct answer to this exercise. I would simply like for you to think about your current work—life situation, in order to numerically quantify your level of satisfaction with this current situation, and then to describe in a few words how you *feel* regarding your current work—life balance situation.

To conduct this exercise, please fill in the following blanks (or turn to your *7 Keys Workbook and Journal* or other dedicated work space and conduct the exercise there).

Today's Date: _____

Your Current Work—Life Balance Satisfaction Level (number between 1 and 10): _____

How do you feel about this level (in three words or less):



Now that you have described how you are currently feeling regarding your current work–life balance situation, you have an opportunity to imagine what is possible. As you begin this journey of change toward life and work on your terms, you need to have a compelling picture of your desired destination on your work–life balance journey. (Note that I do not mean to imply that you will arrive and remain permanently at this destination, given that work–life balance involves continual shifting and rebalancing but instead that this destination represents your *ideal* work–life balance state, the one toward which you would like to strive.)

Desired State of Work–Life Balance

To define your more preferred work–life balance state, picture yourself feeling completely satisfied with how your professional and personal responsibilities integrate. See yourself making choices that allow you to feel good about work and nonwork responsibilities. This is the destination toward which you want to be moving. What does it look like? When you imagine yourself getting closer to it, how do you feel? What is the feeling/state/experience toward which you want your compass pointing? The answer that you come up with will allow you to make choices and take actions that will lead you more effectively on your preferred path.



Describe Your Preferred Work–Life Balance Situation: Here or in your *7 Keys Workbook* and *Journal* or other dedicated work space, you are going to describe your preferred work–life balance state—one in which the mix of your work and life priorities feels great to you.

What does it look like? What does it feel like? How is it different from now? Write your comments, thoughts, and reflections.

Now, from your previous thoughts and reflections, create a concise descriptor in three words or less (hyphenated words are acceptable if you need them) so you have a clear and specific direction for your journey.

Here are some examples:

- efficient and calm
- time for me
- accomplished, effective, fun
- downtime without email
- work-free weekends
- re-engaged with hobbies.

Now, commit to the direction toward which you are moving (write your three-word descriptor here):

My compass is pointing toward _____



The purpose of the previous two fieldwork exercises was (a) to quantify where you are with your work–life balance satisfaction (current state) and (b) to create a compelling description of the kind of work–life balance you crave (desired state). Whenever you find yourself starting to flag on your work–life balance journey—to feel tired, overwhelmed, or off balance—you can remember this three-word descriptor as a reminder of where you want to be heading. Maybe you even want to think of this three-word descriptor as your personal “theme song”—something that is unique to you and can “play”

in your head whenever you start to veer off course and need a reminder of your desired direction.

You have personally selected these three words to represent your ideal work, your ideal life ... your way. Use them as guideposts on your travels!

Let the Journey Begin ...

Now that you know where you are on your journey toward work–life balance and where you are heading, you are ready to resume your “travels.” Fasten your seat belt—here we go!

List of the 7 Barriers and 7 Keys

Barrier	Key
1. Problems With Prioritization	1. Develop Priorities
2. Lack of Boundaries	2. Create Boundaries
3. Inefficient Use of Time, Energy, and Attention	3. Manage Your Day Efficiently
4. Unreasonable Expectations	4. Design Reasonable Expectations
5. Incompatible Values	5. Reprioritize Your Values
6. Unbalanced Organizational Culture	6. Navigate an Unbalanced Organizational Culture
7. Lack of Self-Care	7. Engage in Self-Care

*Advance Praise for Your Work, Your Life ... Your
Way: 7 Keys to Work–Life Balance*

“Julie Cohen has provided an easily-digestible manual for tackling the ever-thorny issue about managing the quality of our work and personal lives. There’s lots of rich good common sense here, framed to help anyone achieve positive benefits with a practical and tactical approach. Her concept of ‘tighten up, then lighten up’ is itself worth the price of admission!”

David Allen

Best-selling author of *Getting Things Done: the Art of Stress-Free Productivity* and *Making It All Work: Winning at the Game of Work and the Business of Life*

“Julie Cohen breaks through the unrealistic standards we all hold ourselves to, especially when it comes to the work–life balance challenge. This book is like having a personal friend and coach, right in the comfort of your own home. The kind who gives you life-changing, invaluable and pragmatic advice, making all the difference in the world.”

Dr. Robi Ludwig

Psychotherapist, TV Commentator and Author

“Julie Cohen’s book, *Your Work, Your Life ... Your Way*, offers a thoughtful, inspiring and practical approach to work–life balance. Her step-by-step approach took away all feelings of overwhelm; while reading it, I thought, ‘I can do this!’ And in the process I felt like I was sitting down with Julie for a chat about life, work and the meaning of it all. Best of all, I know I’m not alone: the stories she shares show that many of us have the same concerns and are looking for similar solutions to the problem of our busy lives. Divided into logical sections like ‘Develop Priorities’ and ‘Create Boundaries,’ I could dip in and out of chapters that resonated with me, reading Julie’s sage advice and exploring my own thoughts and feelings on how these issues impact me and my life.”

Karyn Greenstreet

Small Business Coach, Passion For Business, LLC

“Have you ever thought to yourself, ‘I wish I had time to ...?’ If so (and we all have!), read *Your Work, Your Life ... Your Way*. Instead of wishing for these things, you’ll enjoy *doing* them—with confidence, balance, and satisfaction.”

Larina Kase

Author of *The Confident Leader: How the Most Successful People Go from Effective to Exceptional* and coauthor of *The New York Times* bestseller *The Confident Speaker*

“It’s easy to get stuck in a routine of going through the motions of what we feel we should do each day. We need a catalyst to help us break through those barriers. This great book by Julie Cohen is your catalyst. You’ll discover how to authentically design your life and work, and live each day with meaning, purpose, and fulfillment.”

Mike Robbins

Author, *Be Yourself, Everyone Else Is Already Taken*

“*Your Work, Your Life ... Your Way* is a must read for anyone looking to design and achieve a better work–life balance on their own terms. The book will open your eyes and give you new clarity to what is important and how to be more effective, integral and successful at both work and home.”

Deborah Epstein Henry, Esq.

Founder & President

Flex-Time Lawyers LLC