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## Work-Life Balance: What It Is and How to Achieve It

By Adam Prom – July 31, 2017

It seems that the concept of work-life balance is ubiquitous these days, especially as the millennial generation places importance on flexible working arrangements. Studies show that by 2020, millennials will make up 50 percent of the workforce, and by that same date, 50 percent of all U.S. workers will work remotely. Aliah D. Wright, "[How Millennials Are Shaping Work Flexibility for Everyone](#)," *Society for Human Resource Management*, June 13, 2016. As an attorney, I often see work-life balance mentioned in bar association publications at the local, state, and national levels; however, I find myself asking two questions: What exactly does the concept mean? And how is such balance achieved? This article tackles both questions.

It's commonly understood that work-life balance refers to the manner in which we prioritize our work or personal lives. Yet, the concept is inherently vague and ambiguous when considering that any sort of "balance" can be tipped one way or another. Therefore, the best definition I've found highlights how there is, in fact, no precise definition for the concept because the balance varies over time and cannot be limited to a one-size-fits-all construction. (See Jim Bird, "[Work-Life Balance Defined](#)," WorkLifeBalance.com, 2003.) Instead, work-life balance should be defined by each of us individually, depending on our personal passions and goals. My personal definition of the concept is as follows: Each day I aim to complete my work assignments as thoroughly and efficiently as possible and dedicate several hours to personal pursuits.

As most people reading this article probably know well, numerous professional demands are placed on a young attorney's time and attention. This is especially true when email is constantly at our fingertips, client issues arise at any time of the day or night, and we strive to impress our superiors through long hours and high-quality work product. It's tempting to throw yourself headlong into your work life at the exclusion of almost everything else in your life. But is that a balance? For me, at least, constantly choosing work over almost everything else in my life as a young attorney does not comport with my personal definition of work-life balance.

That obviously begs the second question above—how to achieve personal work-life balance. Some articles emphasize how the pursuit of such a balance seems impossible. (See Mental Health America, [Work Life Balance](#).) Others offer laundry lists of suggestions for finding it, whether it's [6 tips](#), [7 habits](#), or [14 steps](#). One thing pervades all of these lists, however: personal

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choices. We largely choose what we do and when in order to meet our professional obligations and find happiness in our lives. And personal choices align with the personal nature of our individual definitions of work-life balance. In other words, we achieve work-life balance by choosing when and where to satisfy our work obligations and personal passions. Personally, I choose on a daily basis to be as efficient as possible while in the office so I'm able to dedicate several hours each day to personal pursuits outside the office. I choose to work through the lunch hour, and I hardly ever take a break. Although my firm allows attorneys to work remotely at times, I choose to be in the office every day (unless I'm traveling) because I'm more efficient in an office environment. Choices like these help me achieve work-life balance as a young attorney because they foster completion of work assignments in a way that leaves time each day for personal pursuits. I also choose to pursue a career focused on class action litigation because I am passionate about helping those aggrieved by unlawful conduct committed by powerful entities. Choosing a practice that leads to personal satisfaction helps me achieve work-life balance.

Speaking of personal pursuits and passions, unless you're someone who consistently focuses on one or two, it's difficult to make time for a variety as a young attorney. I enjoy numerous activities, including playing hockey, spending time with my wife and our dog, meeting up with friends, reading, volunteering, and traveling. Clearly, there isn't enough time in the day to satisfy each of these passions, but that's why my personal definition of work-life balance is constructed on a daily basis—I choose one or two passions to pursue each day. Attorneys at my firm also pursue a variety of passions, and we're all fortunate that the firm is very flexible when it comes to family life and other time away from work. It can be difficult for young attorneys to take time off, especially longer vacations. Nonetheless, time for personal pursuits can still be created. One of the partners at my firm recently had a suggestion I've taken to heart: Rather than take long vacations, associates should take more 3- to 4-day weekends. The point is that, regardless of your personal passions, work-life balance can be achieved through choosing, to the extent possible, when and where to satisfy your work obligations and individual pursuits.

For young attorneys, the balance will vary by tipping back and forth between work and life. We can affect the balance by choosing to place importance on personal pursuits in addition to professional goals, not to mention focusing on a practice about which we are passionate. By making time each day to satisfy certain personal pursuits, I've found that I'm much more energized and effective while working. And completing work assignments thoroughly and efficiently makes me a happier person outside the office. Although it appears there is no single

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secret to defining and achieving work-life balance, you can begin to find it by constructing your own personal definition of the concept and pondering what choices you can make in your life that align with that definition.

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