# 3 Women and Work-Life Integration – Curated Video Series

**Crucial Conversations for Women in Management**

## 1. Topic

Work-life harmony is important to all leaders and employees. In an era of connectivity, where employees are dealing with digital communications, with emails and texts arriving at all hours of the day and night, it has become even more challenging to strike a work-life balance. Some executives see technology in the home and in the workplace as being an ‘invader’ while others see it as being a ‘liberator.’ Executives reported in a Harvard University study that technology is “a good servant but a bad master.” (Boris Groysberg, *HBR*, March 2014 issue). The ready availability of technologies is often accompanied by an expectation that managers will provide nearly instantaneous responses to every inquiry. Some countries, such as France, have passed laws to ensure that employees can disconnect from their digital devices outside of the workplace, after hours. So, is work-life balance a myth?

In Canada, the 2012 *National Study on Balancing Work and Caregiving* indicated that Canadians are working more than 45 hours per week – with a significant increase in hours worked during the last two decades. The national study found that work weeks have become more rigid, with flexible work arrangements dropping by a third in the past 10 years. In 2012, only 23 per cent of working Canadians were highly satisfied with life, half the number of those ‘highly satisfied’ in 1991.

Employees reported being stressed by increased responsibilities in the workplace, combined with caring for children and aging family members. More than half of the survey respondents reported taking work home with them every week (*Globe and Mail*, October 25, 2012; “Canada’s work-life balance more off-kilter than ever”). Different experts featured in this module debate whether women can “have it all,” achieving professional success and meeting family, community, and, social obligations simultaneously.

## 2. Assignment

Examine the issue of work-life integration in the context of your own leadership. Ask yourself:

a) What does achieving work-life integration mean for you?

b) How do you define success on your own terms?

c) Are you leading the life you want, and getting the balance right between various spheres of activity? Or, are you allowing your commitments and varied demands to control you?

Reflecting on these questions will help women managers decide how to bring value and joy to every part of their lives, whether they are working in the office or operating in other settings. Deliberately setting priorities and making choices allows women to invest their energies selectively, rather than being at the mercy of others. This approach is preferable to feeling resentful as work responsibilities encroach upon other spheres.
3. Video Descriptions and Instructions

Participants will be asked to view three short videos in this module.

The first video is sponsored by Andy Clark, a wellness lawyer, and it is entitled, “Rethinking Work-Life Balance.” It is 5 minutes and 17 seconds long. Clark proposes that work and life are not mutually exclusive entities. He challenges the traditional distinction between work and play, urging managers to define what is worth spending time and energy on in your life. He argues that work-life balance, as traditionally defined, with clear boundaries between the workplace and home life, is a concept that belongs in the ‘scrapheap.’ Clark rejects the notion that managers stop ‘living’ when they report to work each Monday. Instead, he sees work and life as being intertwined. The video can be located at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3mohM05yxs

The second video features Katie Couric interviewing Sheryl Sandberg, the author of *Lean In*. It is one minute and 40 seconds in duration. In this video, women are encouraged to challenge assumptions in the workplace that may limit their advancement or derail their career. These include outdated notions that women with children do not wish to assume senior level roles or may not wish to perform assignments that involve travel. Each situation is to be assessed on its own merits. The video explores how women can ‘have it all’ but perhaps not all at once, depending upon the top priorities they choose at each point in their life journey. Please refer to the video at:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPrxFwUOCtI&list=PLYkZdE6s3f3TtVkJrteh9_7MaG6Wgl&index=18

The third video features Arianna Huffington, of the *Huffington Post*, and other panelists, discussing the importance of the old adage, “To thine ownself be true.” Women leaders are invited to choose what works best for them, in terms of work-life integration, recognizing that everyone has different challenges and needs the freedom to handle these responsibilities as they see fit. The ‘two-legged stool’ that is focused on power and earning money in the workplace is becoming a ‘four-legged’ stool where ‘loving and giving’ roles assume importance. As Dr. Boris Groysberg of Harvard Business School observes: by making deliberate choices about opportunities to be pursued or declined, and by managing their own human capital, giving work and home their due, over a period of years, not just weeks or days, women are encouraged to find the work-life integration that is ideal for them. The video is 5 minutes and 49 seconds long. The video can be seen by accessing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3FTyXNkJBE&list=PLYkZdE6s3f3TtVkJrteh9_7MaG6Wgl&index=108
4. Follow-up Activities and Application

After reviewing these videos, you are being asked to:

a) Think about three role models, women and men, whose work-life integration you admire.
b) Choose one woman leader whose behaviors you do not want to emulate.
c) Identify characteristics of these individuals.
d) What does this reflection reveal to you about your own priorities in terms of work-life harmony and integration?
e) Think about the circumstances in which you achieved work-life harmony.
f) What were the ingredients or conditions that made this possible for you?
g) How can you duplicate these conditions to create success and to reduce stress or distress?

Bill George, the author of *True North*, (2007, Jossey-Bass, page 134) notes, “To lead an integrated life, you need to bring together the major elements of your personal life and professional life, including work, community, and friends, so that you can be the same person in each environment.” He underlines the necessity of remaining grounded in your authentic self, especially in times of chaos, when it is easy to slip into bad habits and to permit crises to overwhelm us.

As Daniel Tenner comments, the dominant paradigm, a legacy from the Victorian era, treats work as an unfortunate necessity or as a curse, something to be avoided. The ideal life is perceived to be the ‘extended holiday.’ This concept treats life and work as being distinct or opposing spheres and also treats people who love their work and take work home as being ‘workaholics,’ a pejorative term. He proposes that the more current way of talking about work and life is “from the point of view of passionate people doing work they care about deeply,” with a sense of purpose and autonomy that is not restricted to working core hours. He sees leaders operating on a continuum where they marry passion and purpose in all aspects of their lives. The notion that work should be limited to 8 hours a day, he says, would be “akin to interrupting Leonardo {Da Vinci} in the middle of painting the Mona Lisa to tell him he’s done his eight hours and needs to go home now” (Daniel Tenner, “Work and life, balance and imbalance,” November 19, 2014).

5. Expert Knowledge

Dawn Nicholson-O’Brien is the President and CEO of Celtic Oracle, an executive services consulting firm. A former executive in the Government of Canada, Dawn served in executive level roles during three and a half decades. She also served as the Vice President of the Institute on Governance, has developed and delivered advanced leadership programs for
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6. **Key Words**

Key words include: work-life integration; work-life balance; dichotomy between work and life; passion and purpose; flexible work arrangements; managing human capital; technology as a good servant but a bad master; connectivity; balancing identities; authentic self.

7. **Additional Resources and Reading**


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