



WORK LIFE BALANCE: THE MODERN MYTH



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“A rose by any other name is still a ...”, as Shakespeare said long ago in Romeo and Juliet. Today, practicing law and raising a family is certainly extremely fulfilling and rewarding, but it remains imbued with the elusive aspiration of “work-life balance.” However, it is often anything but balanced. So why do we continue to subscribe to the notion that successfully doing it all necessarily means balanced?



In Pennsylvania, 31 percent of all lawyers are women. Many of these female attorneys have children and are striving to achieve the elusive balance. Perhaps, this is in vain because the balance may be purely mythical and not worth pursuing. There is no ideal “one size fits all” balance that female attorneys should strive towards. Instead, we should accept that practicing law and raising children requires endless energy and sacrifice. It also requires the critical ability to be present in the moment, meaning that when you are with your children you focus on them, put your blackberry down and stop obsessing about work. Similarly, while at the office, you shouldn’t be distracted by your long personal “to do” list that you need to tackle after work that day.

I am a partner in a plaintiff’s personal injury law firm and have twin 10-year-old children. After the birth of my children, when I was an associate, I approached my firm about working on a “flex time” schedule. My wish was granted, and I was elated that I would have the opportunity to raise my children

and practice law simultaneously. However, I quickly learned that this duality often involved more “overtime” than “flex-time.” Nevertheless, for me it was perfect because it allowed me to continue pursuing my passion of helping clients seek redress for injuries they sustained as a result of someone else’s negligence while spending meaningful time with my children and enjoying family life.

I quickly discovered the difficult reality of work-life balance for an attorney: to be truly present as a parent, and fully engaged as a lawyer, one must wring more hours out of any given day. For example, all too often after working a full day at the firm, I return home to cook dinner, drive the kids to soccer practice or basketball practice, help them with homework, and put them to bed, only to then stay up into the wee hours preparing for the next day’s expert depositions in a product’s liability case, or writing a certification brief in a complex class action case. Of necessity, I have become adept at skillfully scheduling my additional professional activities. For example,



within my role as the Chairperson of the Widener’s Women’s Network, an alumni networking group, I make an effort to host lunchtime events to avoid conflict with my kids’ activities or my carpooling duties. On a daily basis, I juggle the pressing and taxing challenges of litigation with the equally demanding duties of parenting my exuberant twins. It is both exhilarating and exhausting—but rarely balanced.

While doing both is enormously challenging, this duality has served me in both capacities of attorney and motherhood. While advocating for clients whose children have been harmed by defective products or suffered cognitive impairment from exposure to toxic lead paint, I am reminded of how fortunate I am to have two healthy, thriving children. Similarly, being a mom has given me even greater compassion and commitment to helping my clients, particularly injured children.

Overall, during the past ten years of I have come to realize that the phrase “work life balance” oversimplifies a complex concept and is misleading. It implies that women can engage in demanding careers and raise children in perfect rhythm. Truthfully, as female lawyers raising children, we are constantly shifting and realigning our priorities, multitasking, and finding ways to cram more into an already overscheduled existence. This is not necessarily a bad situation. On the contrary, being able to do the work that one is passionate about and also raise a family is to have the best of both worlds. But it presents a very challenging and stressful undertaking each day.

I therefore suggest we do away with our need to use the euphemistic phrase “work life balance” to describe this very demanding feat and instead be candid and forthcoming about what is required to have both a challenging legal career, while being an involved parent; namely, boundless energy and commitment to both endeavors and presence of mind. The rewards and accomplishments on both fronts are enormous. I truly believe having both is ideal, as the journey is fulfilling and challenging—even if not always balanced.

