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MailOnline

How to... balance life and work with tips from a top lifecoach

By [Fiona Duffy](#)

Last updated at 8:27 AM on 7th March 2011

A recent survey claimed almost two-thirds of us are so overwhelmed with work that we have little time for our loved ones. 'We're living in a manic world, but the recession has upped the pressure,' says mum-of-two Amanda Alexander, 41, a lifecoach who specialises in work-life balance.' But don't hand in your notice just yet. Here's how to tip the balance back...



Take responsibility for your decisions

'The biggest obstacle to a good work-life balance is not lack of time, too much to do or too many responsibilities . . . it's you,' says Amanda. 'Recognise you have a choice in everything — from the hours you work (could you downsize, go part time?) to agreeing to organise the school disco. Practise saying "no". And swap the phrase "I have to . . ." with "I choose to . . .," to remind yourself there are always other options.'

Don't be a slave to technology

Ensure technology is your servant, not your master. 'Many women turn off their phone when they're with their children, so nothing disturbs them,' says Amanda.

Play and work nicely

Experts have identified that ethics play a big part in the work-life seesaw, says Amanda. If you devote all your work time to one client, how fair is that to other clients or colleagues? Apply the same argument to other areas of your life. Ask yourself: 'Am I being fair to my family, my friends, and myself, if I'm devoting so much time to work?'

A piece of cake

Write down all your roles in life. You might be a parent, partner, boss, friend, daughter, book club member, PTA chair — not forgetting to include the role 'me'. Eight is the maximum you can juggle. If you have more, it's a sign your work-life balance is out of kilter. Ask yourself: 'What can I do to reduce my roles?' That may mean delegating and reducing commitments.

Set boundaries

This is not about draping barbed wire around your desk — but understanding what's acceptable at work. 'Women are the ultimate multi-taskers but there is a difference between this and taking on too much,' says Amanda. Learn to say no to impossible deadlines. This is hard to do with your boss, but consider the alternative — stress and less family time. Secondly, set in stone occasions such as your child's sports day. 'Have courage when asking your boss for time off,' says Amanda. 'Be assertive, not aggressive— and don't worry about what colleagues will think.' Which brings us to her next point . . .

Mad Men

Seven in ten men say their performance at work is damaged due to a lack of work-life balance

Stop pretending

'Don't lie that you've got a dental appointment — admit you're attending your child's school event,' says Amanda. 'If we continue to pretend our children don't exist, how will we ever move forward?' When the pressure rises, don't feel you 'can't cope'. Instead, repeat two mantras: 'This, too, shall pass.' And: 'Whatever happens, I will manage.'

Capture golden moments

Studies show we can become happier simply by appreciating tiny fortunes. Keep a gratitude diary. Every evening, write down ten things from that day you are grateful for. It could be your first sip of fresh coffee or a blue sky. 'It might sound trite, but it works,' insists Amanda.

Ask for help

Imagine support is being given out and you're at the head of the queue. What would you ask for? Someone to babysit once a week so you could attend aerobics? A cleaner? Proof-reader? Rather than moaning about how much you have to do, identify where you

need help — and ask for it.

Drop some balls

Clever multi-taskers drop balls — and standards — when necessary.

If there's a heavy week ahead at work, let up in other areas. Sit down on Sunday night and decide which balls to drop. Instead of cooking meals from scratch, plan ahead and stock up on healthy ready meals. 'Stop striving for perfection,' says Amanda.

Don't control the clock

'You can't manage time — ever,' says Amanda. 'You can, however, prioritise it. Every morning, ask: "What are the three most important things I need to achieve today?"'

Concentrate on the rocks

Alternatively, adopt the 'big rock' principle. Imagine a clear jar to be filled every morning with rocks and gravel. The rocks are the important things in life; family, health . . . While the gravel represents the 'stuff of life'; (think grocery shopping).

If you put too much gravel in the jar, there won't be room for the rocks. Instead, put the rocks in first — then scatter the gravel around bit by bit.

Done for the day

Towards the end of each working day tell yourself: 'I'll finish this task, then I'm done for the day.' Draw a line underneath it.

Play the '80 today' game

'Imagine you're turning up to your 80th birthday party,' says Amanda. 'What would you like your loved ones to say about you? What would you want to say about yourself? Somehow, I doubt you'll look back and think: "Thank heavens, I kept up with the ironing."' '

Have a safety net

Weave yourself a child-care back-up plan. Write down your options — grandparents, friends. Next time the school closes due to a teacher training day, turn calmly to your list.

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Fiona Duffy

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We all DO have a choice. If you feel you don't, then you need to step back and take a look at why not. It wasn't that long ago that I was earning 'silly' money doing a job I hated. I made the decision to quit (bye bye nice income) and ultimately ended up setting up two of my own businesses - the first of which I setup whilst a single mum with very little income. They are now both very successful and I make a very good living. If you don't like the work-life balance you're being 'given' by your boss, then make the decision to do what is needed to change it. We all do have a choice..... depends on whether you've got the guts to take control of your own life.

- Catriona, Chepstow, 08/3/2011 12:16

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...."kids in the 21st century - hard work, inconvenience and less 'me time'. So yes, take responsibility for your choices. They are your

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Part of the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday & Metro Media Group

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