

[youtube:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AshMtJtr3GU> auto]Summary of keynote lecture to European Commission March 2010 on work-life balance and why it is the secret of high performing teams. Dr Patrick Dixon has been ranked as one of the 20 most influential business thinkers alive today (Thinkers 50 2005). Watch work-life balance and other videos - 2 million video views on this site / YouTube.

Surveys show that work-life balance is number one or two priority for those leaving business schools. People used to focus on getting to the top of their organisations. Now they want to do well but also want to have a life.

It is true that the work-life search is less talked about in a recession, when people are grateful to have a job at all, but it remains in the background. It still matters.

It is also true that if you have known great poverty and are the first in your family ever to go to University, the first to have a professional job, you are likely to be driven by many other things than a desire to get a better work-life balance.

[youtube:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LD72Gzaxxul> 300 250]More to life than work – search for meaning

The search for work-life balance is linked to the search for meaning. In a recent UK survey, 6 out of 10 of 25-35 year olds said they were looking for a higher purpose at work. The more passionate people are about the work they do, the less they complain about work-life balance.

And the search for meaning is part of the rethink about life in general, in a world where many are increasingly worried about sustainability, climate change and how our world will survive.

Work Life Balance is about personal sustainability. It is about survival. About a life worth living.

Actually the phrase Work Life Balance is very unfortunate. It implies that Work is the opposite

of Life – or close to death itself. I prefer the phrase Life-Life Balance.

Overwork destroys families and kills people

We know that long hours damage health, mental well-being, productivity and causes work-place accidents or errors of judgment. Long hours destroy relationships at home, cause breakup of [marriages](#) and can result in damage to children. [youtube:http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jh7h7kDQtLI 300 250]The culture in your own team may be making people ill or destroying their home lives.

Long hours leads to stress, irritability, exhaustion and depression.

People often talk to me about wanting to get better balance in their lives but say their boss is the barrier to this. The interesting thing is that their boss says the same to me, often right to the very top of the organisation. “Hours are too long”. “The organisation has a culture which destroys home life”. But no one has the courage to change it. Like Lemmings walking over a cliff, the entire community continues with a way of life very few of them approve of.

EU directives on working hours have made balance easier for some parts of the population, but many are working just as hard as before, for just as long, for example in those who are in senior management who do not work fixed hours. You find them using smartphones for email on the beach on holiday, taking their computers on a city break for the weekend, doing conference calls to the other side of the world at midnight and getting up at 5am to catch a flight.

Personal situations change fast

[youtube:http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_S3M51NqMc 300 250]

Work-Life balance needs can change as home life changes. Take for example a 55 year old with school-age children whose mother has a stroke and is suddenly living with them and also needing care. 40% of people caring for older relatives also have child-care responsibilities and 41% of workers in some parts of the EU are providing care to elders.

Work-life balance can become even more complicated with two full time wage earners, each having to balance different shifts and work demands, conflicts over available holiday times and so on. And many people are dual earners – with at least two sources of income, two employers, two workplaces to juggle – along with everything else.

A 2009 survey in the UK showed that only 12% of mothers want to work full time, and 31% do not want to work at all outside the home. 28% of men in full time jobs want to work part time, and most fathers want to be able to spend more time with their children.

All this stress and negative talk about work is despite the fact that on many objective measures, workplace conditions have improved over the last three decades: hours, longer holidays, safety, earnings (adjusted for inflation), and better employment rights.

Work-life balance is vital to getting and keeping talented people

One thing is certain: organisations that focus on job flexibility, offering career breaks and part-time contracts are likely to do better in retaining their most talented workers – particularly women.

Or to put it the other way round: in many organisations you will find significant numbers of men on boards or executive teams who have only managed to get that far because the (more) talented women left long ago. That means these organisations are full of incompetent men. How can they compete against organisations that keep all their best talent?

And as many companies have discovered, paying attention to work-life balance can be one of the most powerful ways to become employer of choice. Companies which understand the deeper needs of their staff, who realise they have life outside of work, can pay less than others for the same quality of people, because such workplaces are so attractive to be in.

In many nations women have been out-performing men for years at High School, College, and in the workplace – yet are poorly represented at senior levels in many organisations. Women head up less than 3% of Fortune 1000 companies and are notably absent on many boards.

A Business Week survey found that the top 20 companies were twice as likely as the others to have a high percentage of women in senior leadership.

Here are four mechanisms to bring flexibility into an organisation:

- 1) Hours – flexible hours means part-time, job-sharing, flexible start and finish times or shorter working weeks
- 2) Leave – extra unpaid leave for study, bereavement, parental care, voluntary work etc
- 3) Location – working from home, opportunity to transfer to a different area
- 4) Carer assistance

Toxic testosterone culture

[youtube:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obiPtVss3FQ> 300 250]

Many organisations I know are gripped by a toxic testosterone culture. Aggressive, competitive behaviour, where people seek to prove they are harder working and more committed than each other by being ever-present at work.

This culture infects every aspect of an organisation varying from a decision to start a training programme on a Sunday afternoon, to deciding to take staff to a lap-dancing club or a paint-ball competition as part of a team-building exercise. Such a culture may celebrate masculine characteristics and despise feminine.

You will find women become rarer and rarer as you look at more senior levels in such places.

This is despite all the research that shows the importance of balance in teams, the value of emotional intelligence and relational skills, alongside logical analysis and re-engineering structures or processes.

Change the world by your own example

Either you take hold of the future or the future will take hold of you.

People often talk to me and say that they are afraid to approach their boss about the issue. They think they will be seen as lacking in commitment and it may damage their careers.

So, I say, you have become an economic slave. You are working in a way you do not enjoy and do not approve of, a pattern that is wrecking your life. If you are afraid to do anything in case you lose your job or career path, you are trapped, in a prison of anxiety.

The only way to break free is to look death in the face, confront the fear and put your job on the line. Commit to change, whatever happens. Talk to your boss and explain that the situation has to change. If it does not, you will leave.

Believe in yourself: you have talent and experience. You will find another job.

Life is too short to do things you don't believe in

In many cases the results are a big surprise – to the person concerned. They come to me to tell the story. As they began to talk about leaving, their boss began (perhaps for the very first time) to really begin to see their value, and the gap they would leave. In many cases they find they have managed to negotiate a better solution than they would have dreamed possible.

The world is divided into two kinds of people:

- a) Those who tend to do what they are told, go with the flow, and rarely push back.
- b) Those who challenge, who are driven by a purpose beyond work, and will not compromise those higher values.

I know which I would rather employ: people with integrity, values, passion and self-confidence.

People who are unafraid to speak out, to challenge, and to change things. People who will not be bent under pressure, to compromise what they know is the right thing to do. People I can trust to speak their mind and to tell me the truth, even if I will find it hard to hear. People of courage, and people who are not afraid to put their own job on the line for a principle.

So don't be surprised to find that people want to promote you when you show yourself to be one of these kinds of people, and when you challenge the system in well thought out ways.

And when you start living out your example of a better work-life balance, you begin to model powerfully a way for others to follow. You can lead by influencing those below, beside and above you in rank. A single individual driven by passion and purpose can change an entire organisation – but only if their own lives are consistent with their message.

So if you believe that work-life balance is a serious issue. If you know it is damaging people's lives. If you think it is something that we should take action about, then start by sorting your own life out today.

Question:

You travel a lot. You write books. You have 27,000 followers on Twitter and loads of videos and write blogs. You are very involved in an AIDS charity. How do you get a balance in your own life?

Answer:

Finding balance is not easy, especially if you have young children, and needs constant review. So here are a few things. Sheila and I have four children and when they were younger we made decisions to sacrifice conventional career paths to spend more time with them at home. I started to travel a lot when our youngest was in his teenage years and our oldest had more or less left home.

Sheila and I often travel together on longer trips (several nights away), and I try whenever I possibly can to get back home rather than sleep another night away. We plan ahead and plot out days and evenings off, always trying to book in more than we need as things always crop up. We take a lot more breaks than most people, to try and compensate for the many times I

am working over part or all of weekends and so on.

It has been easier for us because Sheila helps run the company, also is heavily involved as a volunteer in running the AIDS charity we started over 20 years ago, and we both work from home. There is a big degree of time flexibility for both of us, which helps in finding time off midweek for example, in the midst of busy lecturing and other commitments. We try not to take each other for granted. We have been happily married now for over 30 years and are still best friends.

In the ups and downs and difficult choices of life we have also been blessed by faithful friends in our church, who have encouraged and helped us at times of change, and when things have drifted out of balance, to find a way through.

Articles and Videos on HR and related issues

[From redundancy to new job - 10 steps to transform your career](#)

[Future of Executive Education](#) , better work-place training, more effective seminars, high impact workshops and corporate events. Video to 4,500 executive education / event organisers.

[Secrets of business success](#) - workshop video - the most important HR value in the world

[Leadership ethics](#) - video to senior leadership at European Commission on values, compromise and corruption

[Work-life balance](#) - workplace survival and life-life balance

[How to improve your work-life balance](#) - video of World Women's Day presentation at the EU

[Older workers: impact of raising / abolishing retirement age on workplace, recruitment, employment](#)

[How to be a great leader](#) - video comment - motivating others

[Career development](#) - take hold of your own future

[Does social networking destroy "real" workplace relationships?](#)

[Emotional intelligence - in recruitment and team building](#)

[Virtual teams and virtual working](#) - includes video of keynote presentation

Presentations on Human Resources

[Human Resources](#) - war for talent and related issues in context of global trends. For Global HR team of Unilever.

[How to Manage Yourself - personal and business survival guide.](#) The crisis of purpose in most corporations, where it is all going, why it really matters and what to do about it. The elusive secret of personal happiness. How to increase your personal productivity by up to 50% by using the 80:20 rule - and have more free time. Discovering your personal agenda. How to manage stress and how to listen to what your own body is telling you. How to make great things happen at work, at home and in your wider world.

[Building a Better Business - the key to management,](#) marketing and motivation - and the \$20,000 challenge. Leadership training for Barclays Bank / ABSA bank (South Africa, regional focus, Middle East)

[Leadership in an Uncertain World](#) - European School of Management and Technology. Challenges and opportunities - Six Faces of Global Change and what they mean for your business. Keys to success in downturn and beyond.

[Building a Better Business](#) - how the latest book came into being, and why future success depends on showing how you are building a better world for your customers, workers, suppliers, shareholders and wider community. Presentation for the Transformational Business Network annual conference (TBN).

[Stan Am Rheim Leadership Forum 2008](#) - key global trends and impact on [leadership](#) / strategy following credit crunch and global economic chaos. Managing uncertainty, reducing risk and maximising opportunity. Credit crunch in broader context of global trends and economy.

[Taking Advantage of Information Capital](#) - Adapt to changing needs of workers and customers: convergence, crowds, clouds, connections, controls - keynote for global media organised by Ricoh.

[Making Things Happen - Welsh Assembly \(Parliament\) presentation](#) for leaders in national and local government, [health](#) authorities, social services and other statutory agencies on [leadership](#), motivation and change management

[Why bother to change a corporation?](#) : Business School MBA elective programme on Strategic Transformation. The crisis of purpose in business today and why most people don't care about your strategy or the future of the corporation. How to persuade people to change. How to connect with the passions people have for a better life. Reasons why people don't change. How to create effective [leadership](#) and ownership of your corporate strategy.