

I Thought I Was a Present Dad – Then Two Moments Changed My Perspective on Work-Life Balance



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I've been hearing about "work-life balance" my entire adult life. The idea is simple: manage your time, energy and priorities so work commitments don't interfere with personal well-being, relationships, health and leisure. Every article, every wellness expert, seems to say the same thing.

But I want to offer a different perspective, one that goes beyond balancing hours and instead focuses on something much more meaningful.

After years as an entrepreneur, constantly trying to maintain

some sense of balance while also dealing with the guilt that comes with never feeling like I was doing enough at home, I discovered something more valuable than the traditional work-life balance approach. It wasn't about making sure I spent an equal number of hours at work and at home. That kind of balance is a myth. Instead, it was about making the time I did have truly count.

Let's be honest, we can be physically present at home while being mentally and emotionally somewhere else. We're checked out. Our thoughts are focused on work, emails, deadlines and problems. That's not balance. That's just putting hours into different buckets, and that wasn't making a difference. I realized that even when I couldn't be home as much as I wanted, the time I did have could be more intentional and more meaningful.

Let me tell you when everything changed for me.

There were **two** seemingly small encounters that completely reshaped my thinking.

The **first** happened at the marina, where we kept our boat. I was in the pool, tossing my eleven-year-old son in the water while my other kids, all younger, played nearby. My youngest, just an infant, was on my wife's lap. An older man lounging near the pool called me over.

"Son, are those your kids?" he asked.

"Yes, they are," I said.

"You love them, don't you?"

"Very much," I replied.

Then he said something I'll never forget:

"Don't just love them. Suck them up, because you're going to wake up tomorrow morning, and they'll all be grown and gone."

Then he smiled, went back to his book, and that was it.

Well, that was just yesterday, and today my eleven-year-old son is forty-two. That infant? She's thirty.

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The **second encounter** came shortly after, on my drive to the office. I was listening to an NPR interview with a child psychologist who said something that struck a chord.

"The biggest mistake we make as parents," he said, "is dismissing our children's trauma."

He wasn't talking about neglect or a lack of love. He explained that we dismiss their issues and pain because we see it as insignificant compared to our own problems. He said "We've got bills to pay, a mortgage, a career to manage, and loves going haywire. In our minds, that's big stuff, compared to the little things that seem to bother our kids."

Then he gave an example:

"Your four-year-old daughter comes to you crying because she lost her teddy bear. You think, 'It's just a teddy bear. We'll get her another one this weekend.' But to her, losing that teddy bear is the same amount of pain and trauma as you losing your home. It was her world, and now it's gone. She's traumatized. She can't get her four-year-old brain around this. She can't process that loss the way an adult would. But because we're so wrapped up in our own big and 'important' problems, we don't see it that way."

Then he gave another example:

"Your adolescent son comes home from school, upset because some kid picked on him, and instead of standing up for him, his friends laughed and walked away. What do we do, especially as dads? We say, 'C'mon, don't be so silly. Toughen up. Go

play.' We dismiss his trauma. But to that boy, having his friends turn on him is the same amount of pain and trauma as you finding out your spouse is cheating on you. He hurts so much it feels unbearable. But again, we dismiss it, because we're dealing with what we think are bigger issues, our careers, bills, and relationship troubles."

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WOW!

And that's when it hit me. In business, I've always made it a priority to see what we do and how we serve our clients through their eyes. This perspective has been part of my business north star throughout my career. In fact, I often reference two of my heroes to reinforce this philosophy.

When asked how he continues to innovate, Steve Jobs famously said, "I start with the customer experience, and I work backwards from there."

Before breaking ground for his Disney World theme park, Walt Disney was seen lying on the ground, snapping pictures. When asked what he was doing, he replied, "How can we possibly create magical experiences for our little guests if we don't see this place from their perspective?"

I knew this philosophy. I just didn't consider applying it at home. Duh!

So, I decided it was time to start seeing my home world, my loved ones, from a different perspective, theirs. No matter what kind of day I'd had, whether it was great or not so great, productive and profitable, or a day with some major losses, I made a conscious effort to see things differently.

Instead of viewing my home life through my eyes and my perspective, I started asking myself one simple question every time I walked through the door: *If I were that little person*

or that significant other looking at me, what would I love from me at this moment in time?

Rather than dwelling on my own issues, I put myself in their shoes. And that one shift changed everything, not just the amount of time I spent with my family, but *how* I spent that time. I went from being there in body but only half-present to truly immersing myself in the moment.

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That shift didn't just change my family life, it changed my entire outlook. It made me realize that success isn't just about what we accomplish in our careers, but about the connections we build with the people who matter most.

I know this may be sounding a bit like a therapy session, and I get it. But here's the simple truth – we can't truly succeed at work if we're not happy and fulfilled at home. And... and this is a **BIG AND**, nothing is more important than sucking up the people we love and making the most of every single moment with them. Because these moments are fleeting. Your little ones are little today, but tomorrow, they'll be grown and gone.

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