Stop Splitting Yourself in Half: Seek Out Work-Life Boundaries, Not Balance

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Early in my career, I learned to split myself in half. There was a "work Lindsay" and a "personal Lindsay," and they were never meant to be in the same place at the same time. The underlying notion, rampant across the business world, is that it's somehow weak to show any signs you're a person. Better to turn off those personal matters, even if they're as simple as needing to go home and cook dinner or as mundane as the consequences of spilling coffee on your blouse before a meeting. It all had to stay where it belonged: the personal side and the business side. I was supposed to be chasing the much-discussed work-life balance, constantly trying to force these two sides to be equal. I ended up ignoring my whole self as a result.

Then a transition point in my life changed my perspective. I was changing jobs, before I started Casted, and I'd just read a book that got me thinking about priorities: *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less* by Greg McKeown. In the book, McKeown characterizes essentialism as "the relentless pursuit of less but better," a disciplined approach that asks us to sort the "trivial many" from the "vital few" as we choose where we will focus our energy and effort. That perspective spoke to me — the answer wasn't a transactional notion of hours at my desk or away from my desk — I needed to consciously identify what mattered most to me and take control of my time and attention.

I realized something crucial: No one was going to come to me and say “You should probably work less,” or “Don’t respond to your emails tonight.” Those nudges may happen more now in companies, but work will always fill the cup you give it. As I transitioned into the new job, I had an opportunity to try to put my new perspective into practice. My focus shifted away from the dichotomy of a work-life balance and toward the idea of boundaries around my priorities, my “vital few.”

As I kept working through my perspective on this, I experienced two more life-changing milestones. First, I started working with my executive coach, who helped me understand that business is human. The pursuit of a work-life balance had taken the humanity out of my work. She showed me how ridiculous it was to think your personal life wouldn’t impact your work life and vice versa. The second milestone was starting Casted and stepping into the role of CEO and co-founder. Those milestones led me to a realization: The pursuit of work-life balance is a myth. I seek out boundaries that preserve and nurture my whole self.

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Boundaries support the whole self

What makes boundaries different from balance? Balance implies two things that aren’t equal that you’re constantly trying to make equal. It creates the expectation of a clear-cut division. A work-life balance fails to acknowledge that you are a whole person, and sometimes things can be out of balance without anything being wrong. Sometimes you’ll spend days, weeks and even whole seasons of life choosing to lean more into one part of your life than the other.

Boundaries ask you to think about what’s important to you, what drives you, and what authenticity looks like for you. Boundaries require self-awareness and self-reflection, along

with a willingness and ability to prioritize. Those qualities help you to be more aware and more capable of making decisions at a given moment. By establishing boundaries grounded in your priorities, you're more equipped to make choices. Boundaries empower you to say, "This is what I'm choosing right now. I need to be fully here until this is done."

Boundaries aren't static, either. They demand that you reevaluate priorities, consider different contexts and have those short and important conversations with yourself before you enter a situation or take up a task. Is this where I need to be right now? Does this align with my priorities? Is it the right thing for all of me?

So here I was, new to the role of CEO and thinking about how to put the human back in business. In starting Casted, I brought those ideas with me from the beginning, as I aspired to build a culture that lets people bring their whole selves to work. My hope for my employees is that they're doing something they love so much that they take who they are at work home, too. Not the sending of emails or their attendance in meetings, but the complex person they are all the time, transcending those distinctions.

Here are three ways I approach leadership as I encourage our team to bring their whole selves to work:

1. Don't assume you know what being human means to everyone

I make a conscious effort to remember that others come to Casted with different personal and professional experiences and backgrounds than my own. I don't assume that I know what being human means to my team members when I ask them to be themselves at work. I have three kids and a husband, and I live in the suburbs. And by the way, I'm a heterosexual, white, 39-year-old woman. That's me, but it's not everyone. I

do my best not to assume that I know how my team members have shaped their priorities or what they need to thrive.

It goes back to another discussion I recently had with my team – the difference between a four-day workweek with Fridays off, whether or not it's helpful to them, versus a truly flexible schedule that respects the needs of employees and trusts them to do their work *and* live their lives. I don"t want to offer "perks" that only *appear* helpful. I want to support them as they bring their whole selves to work, and I want to create an environment that offers the psychological safety for each employee to be human here in all their unique ways.

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2. When you ask people to show up as themselves, be careful not to ask them to show up as you

Inviting your employees to come to work as themselves fully – not split in half and hiding their humanity – can be freeing. As a leader, though, you have to be careful not to imply they should show up as you. You know what I mean, because you've likely read about (or been part of) a company where all the employees felt obligated to emulate a CEO with a powerful personality. They're still stuck walking a balance beam of expectations, trying to show up the way they think you want them to.

Here's the thing: I want more voices in the room, not just mine echoing back at me. I want the full experience of who my employees are so we keep growing, changing and getting better with more seats at the table. But even with the best of intentions, leaders need someone checking to make sure a passionate CEO modeling the qualities of showing up as

themselves doesn’t send a message that says: “Be more like me when you’re here.”

3. Lead by example

I want to be true and honest with those around me about who I am and what I’m here for, including my kids, friends, employees, partners and even my board. Part of leading by example is sharing in both directions: My kids understand that I like and care about my work. They’re building this with me, so I don’t shy away from explaining business language or answering questions. One of my sons is very interested, because I let him in on it instead of drawing a firm line between work and life. My kids know when I take an important call, I’m not choosing work over them. At the same time, my team and board and customers know when I’m going on vacation with my family or when I take a call with my boys in the car. They understand that time with my family fuels my work, too.

As I share, I work to ensure I’m helping build a safe space, not creating an environment where people feel forced to reveal anything. And I’m conscious of the line between demonstrating vulnerability and oversharing at the risk of hurting my team’s confidence in me.

Being you wherever you are is so simple, but for some reason, it’s not easy. We’ve made it hard. We’ve drawn lines and asked people to hide their humanity. I’m building something bigger than a business, and it’s going to take all of me, knowing myself and my priorities, and no longer chained to the battle for balance.

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