

Welcome to the **#AdventAdvantage**

15 Questions to get your #WorkLifeBalance sorted



1. *Why is better work-life balance important to you?*

Can you quantify the positive impact it would make on your life in 2019? What are the potential costs to you – and perhaps to those around you – of not improving your work-life balance?

Being clear about our reasons for wanting better work-life balance is important if we're going to make changes that stick. List your reasons here:

2. *Are you a Separator or an Integrator?*

Psychologists have discovered that when it comes to managing work-life balance some people are Separators – which means they prefer to keep the two separate – while others are Integrators.

Separation was the traditional culture in organisations - with an expectation that non-work issues would be kept out of the workplace. As more and more mothers remain in the workforce Integration that allows family issues to be dealt with at work has increasingly become acceptable. At the same time growing use of smart devices has led to our #AlwaysOn culture where workplace issues frequently interrupt non-work hours.

So what's your preference? And how compatible is it with the preferences of people around you – both at home and at work?

3. Are you suffering from work-life conflict or benefitting from work-life enrichment?

When you think about your roles as a parent and an employee are they in conflict with each other? Does being a good parent compromise your work role or vice versa? Do you feel pulled between the two?

Where does the conflict arise? Often it can be around time but it can also be about the emotional energy you are putting into one part of your life.

Rather than experiencing conflict between your home and work roles how can you combine them so both parts enrich your life? For example, are you Integrating too much? Do you need to set better boundaries?

4. Is it time to re-write your scripts?

The way we choose to play our parent and employee roles is often based on unconscious scripts we've developed over time or learnt from others. Is there a better way for you to play those roles that would bring more balance into your life? What small adjustments could you make that would lead to less guilt and more joy in your life?

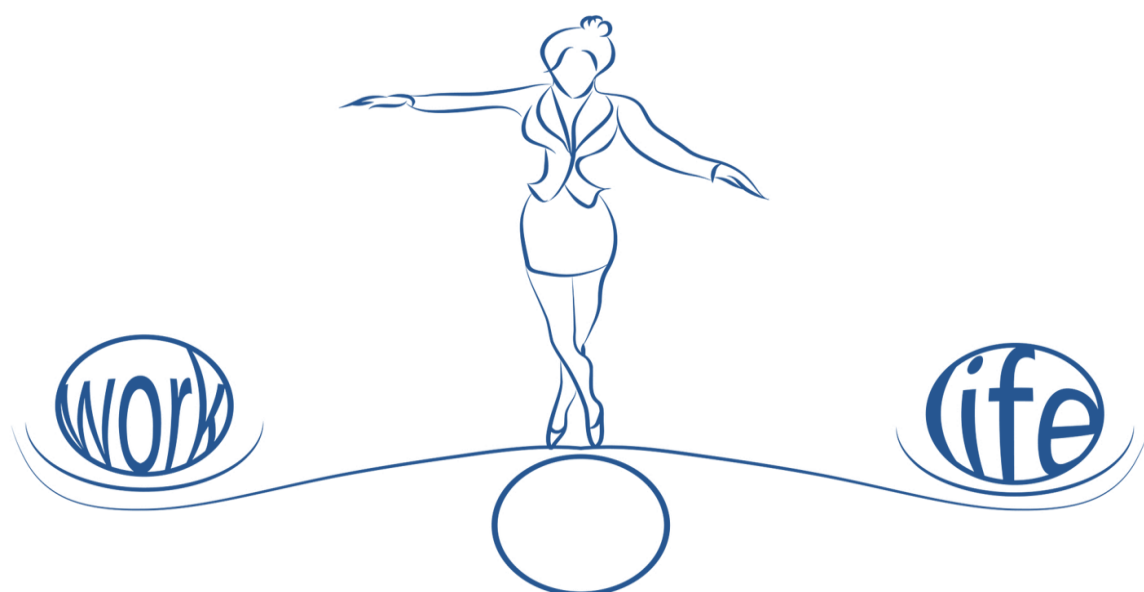
5. Do you need more flexibility at work?

Finding work-life balance is about managing our energy and our time. So far we've been looking at how our preferences and the way we play the various roles in our lives impacts our energy.

If shifting our energy is half the equation, then adjusting the time we devote to our various roles is the other half. It seems to me that most people nowadays are feeling a time squeeze – busy at work and putting in longer and longer hours. If that's your situation what would you like to be different?

Do you want to work fewer hours overall? Does that mean working part-time or simply managing your full-time workload and reigning in excessively long hours? Do you want to work more flexible hours? Or even work from home some of the time?

Get clear on how you want to balance your work and non-work time. When clarity precedes action we often find more options opening up for us.



6. *What sort of flexibility do you need?*

Is it time flexibility? This might mean flexing when you work your full-time hours or reducing them to less than full-time.

Full-time flex arrangements include compressed hours where you work the total in less than five days and annual hours. Reduced hours arrangements include term-time working and job-share.

Or do you need location flexibility – working some or all of the time at home or other location?

What arrangement would improve your work-life balance?

7. *Are you focusing on the right things?*

Do you spend your working day focussed on the high value outputs that achieve your objectives? Or does your time get tied up in low value activities?

What changes do you need to make to focus on the high value stuff?

8. What flexible working arrangements does your employer support?

If you're thinking of negotiating a more flexible working arrangement in the New Year the best place to start is by meeting your employer where they currently are rather than proposing a radical arrangement that's never been tried before. Once you've demonstrated you can be successful while working flexibly you can ask for the radical arrangement if you still need it.

The vast majority of employers now have flexible working policies – what arrangements do the ones at your workplace specify?

9. Are you prepared for your employer's objections?

Almost everyone with at least 26 week's service has the legal right to ask for flexible working and the legislation allows employers seven legitimate reasons for rejection. (See the graphic on the next page.)

It's useful to know what they are so you're better prepared and have a stronger negotiating position. If you want to renegotiate your working hours spend some time thinking about how you might counter the seven legal arguments.

The 7 legal reasons for rejecting a #flexibleworking request:

- extra costs that will damage the business
- the work can't be reorganised among other staff
- people can't be recruited to do the work
- flexible working will affect quality and performance
- the business won't be able to meet customer demand
- there's a lack of work to do during the proposed working times
- the business is planning changes to the workforce

<https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working/overview>

10. *What will it cost your employer to lose you?*

Identifying your value to your employer can give you positive leverage in negotiations.

There's a demonstrable cost to your employer if you leave or scale down your ambitions. That's the tangible cost of replacing you in your current role and it's easily calculated:

- *The cost of recruitment fees;*
- *Add around 5% of your salary to represent the lower productivity of your replacement as they learn to do your job:*
- *And another 5% of your manager's salary as he/she spends time recruiting and training your replacement.*

There are also hidden costs. Consider all the knowledge you have about how your employer's business works – and which will be lost when you leave.

Does this add to the business case for your employer agreeing your flexible working arrangement?

11. How will your flexible working arrangement impact others?

What will it mean for how you interact with your manager?

Do you need to agree a formal updating process? In my experience managers need to feel they have some control over the situation – so how will you make that happen?

What about your colleagues? If you're part of a team do you need to clarify how and when you can be contacted (for example)?

If you manage other people what sorts of agreements and boundaries do you need to put in place so they know when to contact you and how to define a genuine emergency?

How well you manage the people around you will determine how successfully you're able to work flexibly.

12. What's the likely impact on clients or customers?

In my experience impact on customer service (whether your customers/clients are internal or external) is the most common reason managers give for refusing flexible working.

In our fast paced #AlwaysOn business world we tend to fall into the trap of thinking that we need to deliver everything immediately. In reality clients are rarely the issue – but client management is important. Many of your clients or customers are also likely to be working flexibly so they will understand your desire for better balance.

If your working pattern becomes more flexible what needs to be put in place to manage clients? Do you need to improve your own client management skills?

13. Do you need to boost your skills?

As we plan for flexible working we may realise our skills need to be refreshed. Where do you need to upgrade?

- *Management skills. In addition to becoming better at client management we may also need to get smarter about managing our boss and the people who report to us. In a flexible working arrangement the focus moves from hours to outputs and the emphasis shifts to a more coaching style of management. Upgrading project management skills – particularly if you or your team are working remotely – can also bring dividends.*
- *Interpersonal skills. A successful flexible arrangement depends on first class communication skills. We need to be clear about the what and the when – with our colleagues and our manager. Other interpersonal skills we may need to upgrade include self-organisation/self-management and time management.*
- *Technical skills. We depend on technology to carry out many aspects of our work – particularly when we opt to work remotely or in virtual teams. This may call for us to be more self-sufficient so we can use the technology more effectively.*

The good news is that flexible working rarely requires skills that you don't already posse. It's often a question of enhancing a few key ones. What does that mean for you?

14. What support do you need outside of work?

The past few questions have looked at making changes at work. Just before you start to take action let's take a final look at what needs to change in the rest of your life. As you've thought about your working patterns – and the implications of changing them – it may have occurred to you that you need support outside work to make it happen.

As women we have a tendency to think we need to do everything ourselves. Sometimes it seems quicker than asking someone else to do it. But we need to make space for what's important in our lives; and what will help us find balance.

We also talked previously about boundaries. How are yours? Are there any you need to adjust – perhaps with a specific family member or friend?

15. *What's the first small step?*

By now you should have a much clearer picture of what good work-life balance would look like for you in 2019.

One more question:

On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 100 (perfect) where would you put yourself currently in terms of that preferred work-life balance?

And: what's the one small step you can take or one small change you can make that will move you one point up your scale?

Making small incremental changes is often more effective than making bigger ones. It allows for 'course corrections' and provides more options. You become more confident as you move slowly in the right direction.



If you enjoyed the #AdventAdvantage you'll find more information on the topics raised in my forthcoming book #Upcycle Your Job which will be published in the Spring of 2019.

For updates on the publication date join the [Job #Upcycling Community and Information Exchange](#).

Stay in touch with me by signing up to my [mailing list](#).

I'm Anna Meller - the Work ReBalance Mentor. With twenty five years' experience supporting individuals and organisations to better work-life balance I'm the UK's premier expert.

I work with ambitious professional women who want to balance their corporate career with their family life. Through my Balanced Leader training, coaching and mentoring you'll feel empowered to make choices that work for you and your employer – so that you keep your career and your employer keeps key talent.

Learn more about me and my coaching services [on my website](#).

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