

# Work/life balance: changing life habits

*Penny Swinburne*

## **Purpose**

People are often aware of a general dissatisfaction with ‘the way things are’ – spending too much time working, things they would like to do that they don’t have time for. This exercise was originally designed to help working women achieve a work/life balance nearer to their desired one. With the current pressures of 24/7, it has a potentially much wider audience.

## **Description**

The exercise helps the client think about the reality behind their work/life balance. It raises awareness of what their current situation actually is, what they would really like it to be, supported by developing strategies to bring about the change. It can convert a generalized dissatisfied feeling to a clearer perception of what is at the root of this and whether it’s worth the effort to change it. It can also lead to someone accepting that they do some things really because they want to, although it feels like an ‘ought’.

## **Process**

Ask the client to draw a circle. This is then divided into three segments, representing roughly in size the amount of time they spend in: paid work (W), home life (H) and leisure (L). W, H and L are written on the relevant segments. This first

circle represents life **as it is now**. The client then draws a second circle of the same size, similarly divided into three segments, but representing their life **as they would like it to be**.

In deciding what goes where, H are activities that have to be done, but are not particularly pleasurable to the person – they would not miss them if they did not do them. L are pleasurable activities. For example, gardening may be in H for some if they do it just to avoid a mess and in L for others because they really enjoy gardening.

If someone is *highly stressed* by some activities that leave them little energy for other things, it's useful to rephrase the exercise as '*how much time and energy*' is spent in each of the three segments.

Once the diagrams are completed, the coach can help with (a) awareness raising, by asking questions around what is in each segment and (b) developing strategies to move the current situation towards the desired proportions. Useful questions include:

- What's in the H/L segment at the moment?
- What else would you like to be in the L segment?
- How would it feel if you could change it?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how important would it be to you to change it?

For the H (and W) segments:

- Who else could do it?
- What would happen if? (it wasn't done, someone else did it etc)
- Replace the statement 'I have to' with 'I want to'. How does that feel?

## Pitfalls

Naturally detailed thinkers may start analyzing their days hour by hour, including time spent sleeping and where this fits. It helps to emphasize that this is not so much a time log, but about how life feels to them in time/energy and satisfaction terms.

## **Bibliography**

McMahon, G. (2005) *No More Anxiety: Be Your Own Anxiety Coach*, London: Karnac Books.