



**Sweaty She Monday (9/14/09):**  
**News Flash: Work-Life Balance Does Not Exist**

**By Susan Farago**

*Weekly Sweaty She postings can be found on the NEW "Sweaty She" FAN PAGE on Facebook.com or at [www.susanfarago.com](http://www.susanfarago.com).*

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Hot – Cold. Life – Death. Light – Dark. Training – Recovery. I could go on and on with examples of how opposites exist in our world but I think you get the idea. Opposites are necessary to help keep things balanced otherwise we find ourselves on the fringe of extremes. And while sometimes it is good to go to the extreme (how else will you know where the edge is?), it is not necessarily good to hang out there. Through the ages, philosophers and physiologists talk about how we as humans strive for “homeostasis” - the need for balance and stability.

While I tend to go to extremes, I am fundamentally a “Yin-Yang” type of gal and I know that when I swing to one side, it’s only a matter of time before I swing to the other, briefly passing through the center of the two extremes and experiencing “balance”. My challenge is to minimize the swings so they look more like rolling hills rather than a mountain range.

So you can imagine my shock and surprise when someone firmly informed me that work-life balance does not exist. Period. End of discussion.

Huh? I was dumbstruck.

This news flash came about when I was interviewing a woman for an article. Upon first meeting her, it was very evident that she is an active, fit, dynamic force - a petite package of seemingly unending energy, a business owner, a mother and wife. I could feel energy radiating from every fiber of her being. I wanted to stick my finger out and see if I would get a shock if I touched too close to her force field. Midway through our chat she dropped the “no work-life balance” bomb and I missed the next 3-4 minutes of what she was saying because my mind was fixated on this notion of life balance not existing. For a control freak and multi-tasker like me, it was the equivalent of telling a four year old that Santa Clause does not exist.

Through the ages (or at least starting in the 1970’s), women have strived to bring home the bacon and fry it up in a pan. Corporations have spent millions of dollars promoting “work-life balance” through seminars, training, education, conferences, and round tables. Books have been written. Songs have been sung. Claire Huxtable from the Cosby Show was my hero. And all for not?

Was I the only one overreacting? After pondering this issue for a few weeks, I decided to take my own little informal poll at the Sweaty She Monday coffee. Questions and results are as follows:

1. Does work-life balance exist?

yes = 4

no = 2

2. Does work-life balance exist for you?

yes = 2

no = 4

General Comments:

“Work-life balance exists in an imaginary world.”

“I have a lot of one, and a lot of the other, but not both at the same time.”

“I don’t believe it exists and certainly not for me. Now I’m depressed.”

“Work-life balance exists but it’s like a jackalope or a chupacabra - an urban legend that has been recorded on post cards and home video, but people still don’t believe it really exists.”

Maybe when we work too hard or are completely submerged in the quagmire of our lives, we become too one-sided. If balance requires being in the middle, then always being on one side may not afford the benefit of even being able to SEE the middle and it takes a leap of faith to believe in its existence. Perhaps there is an odd relationship between reaction and balance. If we are always reacting, can we truly become balanced? Or is it through reaction that we achieve balance?

I have experienced glimpses of work-life balance – that short lived blissful state where everything feels under control, in order, and perfect (and oddly enough usually correlates to my e-mail in box being less than 1 page long). Then five minutes later something blows up or goes haywire. But for a few brief moments, it is nirvana.

Maybe there is no such thing as work-life balance? But I choose to believe in it. I’ve seen it, felt it, tasted it, experienced it. And I’ve decided that it is a lot easier to give up and declare that something does not exist rather than fight to attain it, even for a brief moment. So as I journey between extremes, I will continue my fight for that elusive feeling of work-life balance - when everything is just right.

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