

## Unplug from the Chaos and Recharge Your Life

By Suzy Welch



Photo: Deborah Feingold

You're exhausted after a long day at the office and you hear, *brrrrr-ing!* Is that your boss calling you again on your work cell? Your child's play phone buzzing? Or the alarm on the stove telling you you've just burned dinner? Balancing your life at home and your work life can be stressful, but it doesn't have to be. Suzy Welch, author of *10-10-10: A Life-Transforming Idea*, shares ways to unplug from the chaos and live a more balanced, meaningful life.

Far be it from me to counsel anyone away from a nice glass of red wine or gorgeous massage, but truth be told, such devices never particularly worked for me when my kids were screaming hysterically that the bathwater was cold while my boss was calling on my cell phone to talk about how wrong my slides looked.

Nope, my tips for how to unplug and recharge when work and life collide are all mental. Metaphysical, even. But at least I know they work.

## Forget the Balancing Act



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The first step is frighteningly simple. Accept the fact that there is no such thing as work-life balance. I'm not kidding. Quite the opposite. I just know from years and years of trying to do it all and being everything to everyone that "balance" is an unattainable goal. In the end, you can only make choices, some of which are quite hard, and take responsibility for their consequences, most of which are not

perfect. In other words, my first piece of advice is to understand that you are living a life of your own design. If you feel off-kilter or stressed, your decisions are the reason. And if you want to feel less off-kilter and stressed, you can make different decisions to get you there.

## Own Your Choices



My second tip is related. What I suggest is that you backtrack a bit and make sure you have fully faced into your decisions and their consequences.

Look, every decision we make has an upside and a downside. If you cut back to 20 hours a week at work and limit your travel, you'll certainly see more of your kids, but your ascent to the corner office will certainly slow down. That's reality. It's the way business works, and I would even

argue that it's the way business should work. Availability matters, especially in times of economic crisis. And yet, all too often we blame someone else—society, our bosses, our co-workers with no kids and tons of ambition—for the downside of our judgment calls.

How nerve-racking such mind games can be.

How freeing it is instead—how energizing—to accept ownership of our lives. I will never forget the day when I did that. All four of my kids were under 10 years old at the time and, as usual, dinner included a recounting of school events and other activities I had missed because of work. "Why can't you be at soccer practice?" one of my sons started in.

I was just about to launch into a sob story about financial security when, suddenly, it dawned on me that money wasn't the real issue. It was a smokescreen I put up to avoid talking about my values and choices. If I wanted to be home full-time, we could downsize our lifestyle to make that possible. But the truth was I loved my work. It felt important to me; it gave me purpose and happiness. I honestly believed that it made me a better mother. I wasn't sorry I worked. Indeed, I'd made a decision to do so. Now all I needed to do was acknowledge its consequences.

Which I did with a nice long lecture.

The complaining soon stopped. I'm not saying my kids suddenly started loving my decision to work, but they came to understand and accept it with me.



## All in Time

My final tip is probably the easiest to take of the lot. It's just this: Remember that the main source of any work-life balance conundrum is typically your children needing you more than you can be there, and the immutable truth is that your children eventually grow up and don't need you anymore. Oh, okay, I know children always need you. It's not yet noon as I write this and I've already been on the phone three times with my daughter who is a sophomore in college. Her older brother

has checked in once to discuss car insurance and other life worries. And the day is young.

But that terrible, nagging feeling of "Help, there's not enough of me to go around!"—it's been gone for years. My kids now say things like, "I'd love to talk longer, Mom, but I need to get a pedicure before I go out tonight." So, am I telling you to just endure the chaos and try to hold it together? Not at all. As I mentioned, balance doesn't exist. Only your decisions exist, along with their consequences. Understand them, own them, even embrace them.

And know also that time is on your side. Eventually, work-life "balance" works itself out.

*Suzy Welch is a columnist for O, The Oprah Magazine and author of [10-10-10: A Life-Transforming Idea](#), which presents a decision-making strategy for success at work, as well as parenting, love and friendship.*