



Off Balance: Getting Beyond the Work-Life Balance Myth to Personal and Professional Satisfaction

Matthew Kelly

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The prescriptive follow-up to the *New York Times* bestseller *The Dream Manager*.

One of the major issues in our lives today is work-life balance. Everyone wants it; no one has it. But Matthew Kelly believes that work-life balance was a mistake from the start. Because we don't really want balance. We want satisfaction.

Kelly lays out the system he uses with his clients, his team, and himself to find deep, long-term satisfaction both personally and professionally. He introduces us to the three philosophies of our age that are dragging us down. He shows us how to cultivate the energy that will give us enough battery power for everything we need and want to do. And finally, in five clear steps, he shows us how to use his Personal & Professional Satisfaction System to establish and honor our biggest priorities, even if we spend a lot more time on some of the lesser ones.

Off Balance: Getting Beyond the Work-Life Balance Myth to Personal and Professional Satisfaction Details

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Bill says

Off Balance, by Matthew Kelly, goes beyond time management and work-life balance to discuss overall satisfaction with life and how to increase it. He begins by asking the reader what he/she likes and doesn't like about his/her life. He then critiques the individualism, the hedonism, and the minimalism that characterizes American culture today. He offers the alternative of becoming the "best-version-of-yourself" that you can be as the most effective strategy to achieve satisfaction.

He defines satisfaction as "the contentment and fulfillment that comes from the gratification of needs and desires." There are short term and long term aspects, and there is a continuum. It is different for different people. It is not merely getting what you want or mere pleasure. The reader takes a questionnaire in the book to find out areas of more and less satisfaction in his/her professional and personal life.

He emphasizes the importance of setting priorities in an example of an executive who worked all the time until his wife told him one day that she didn't think their marriage was working. He identified values and priorities and started to make choices that honored those priorities. He turned his life around by doing so.

A necessary condition of a life lived intentionally is the personal, mental, and physical energy that enables a person to pursue his/her values. He asks the reader to learn to know what people and activities give and what drains this personal energy.

He puts all this together in a process for the reader to follow, a system to drive behavior to higher levels of satisfaction. He starts with assessment, using the questionnaire. He then asks the reader to list and prioritize values using a priorities exercise. Next is the listing of a set of core daily habits to measure that increase energy and support the priorities. Planning and review weekly in a strategy session helps the reader to identify successes to celebrate and plan for the following week's value-consistent activities. Finally, he recommends a quarterly review of the satisfaction questionnaire and the successes and failures in the process. That is done with another person to be accountable to that person for following the process.

In applying these ideas to my own life, I identified three areas in my work with which I was dissatisfied. I made a plan to change, and I adopted a simple measure to do during the day. As a result, this week, I have reduced the waiting time for patients, completed most of the notes before the end of the day, and gave more after-visit summaries to patients before they left the office. As a result, I have had more satisfaction at work this week than even the high level of satisfaction I had before doing this.

It is easy for work to dominate a physician's life. As a result of this values clarification process, I have realized more deeply that work is not the sole or primary priority of my life. It is still hard work, but I can tell myself I will exercise now, or do something for my wife now, and still get the work done soon enough. Kelly's point about energy reminded me how important exercise, diet, and sleep are; and as core habits, I attend to them daily.

Although I found Kelly's discussion of meaning and philosophy a little shallow, his specific recommendations and system are proving to be very helpful to me. There isn't anything really new here, but

being reminded to clarify my values and organize my life to be more consistent with them is proving to make my life more satisfying. It's not the reading of this book that is valuable; it's the implementation, the following of the advice, that gives value to Off Balance.

Clare Cannon says

This was a surprisingly helpful book which was great to read through, but it could be even more useful as an aid to a group workshop, perhaps for young professionals starting out, or a professional development session for colleagues.

Its premise is to help us to learn how to become the best version of ourselves that we can be. Instead of focusing on a balance between everything, it focuses on helping you find satisfaction at the deepest level through identifying and accomplishing what is most important to you.

It identifies key areas to focus on, then takes you through practical steps to work through:

- the importance of planning, and how to work through a 'strategy' session
- then how to strategise each day to allow you to accomplish the important things as well as the every-day.
- how to develop core habits, with a great list of suggested habits
- how to prioritise between priorities (a step-by-step process that's easy to follow)
- how energy can effect what you can accomplish - which is common sense, but he actually shows how you can do something about it

Most helpful is that a solution is offered for every issue identified.

It's well explained and practical, but most importantly, what it suggests will help you become a better person, because he brings every issue around to what is most important in life, for example, one's relationship with spouse and kids, time and energy to do the things you are passionate about, how to help yourself to work well, and to have meaningful, rewarding relationships with your friends. Make time for it.

www.GoodReadingGuide.com

James says

I loved this book! Kelly outlines a common-sense alternative to the concept of "balance" between our personal and professional lives. Instead, he stresses that we should strive for satisfaction through strategically planning for the life we want. I especially liked the emphasis that the purpose of life is to "become the-best-version-of-yourself."

I'd highly recommend this book to anyone who is looking to improve their satisfaction with their life! While Kelly cites corporate America quite often, I found all of the advice and practical and helpful for my work in Education, and I'd guess it applies in other fields as well!

Bea Elwood says

I am interested in learning more about "Flow" or "Work/Life Balance" or "Personal and Professional Satisfaction" - this book's promise to a happier life. This issue I had with this book was that it had a similar feeling to one of those "seminars". Y'know the ones, where the charismatic guy leads you through some inspiring exercises, the whole time promising to help you and teasing that we are getting so close, and then leaves you in the end with a to-do list of nicely vague check-marks to accomplish on your way to greater happiness... Maybe two or three things to consider but overall a bit too much cheerleader and not enough coach.

Nguyen Luan says

I'd highly recommend this book to anyone. Great book to inspire one to look at what really matters in life and the book will make you reflect on the way you are living your life. Some of my favorite quotes come from "Off Balance"

“Time is your most valuable resource. Guard your time. Plan your time. Protect your time. Defend your time. Don’t waste time. Time is life, and life is time. If you waste your time, you are wasting your life.” - Matthew Kelly

“Life is about saying yes to the things that help you become the best version of yourself and no to the things that don’t.” - Matthew Kelly

“Your life and mine come at a cost. Every choice we make eliminates other options, and those other options are part of the cost involved in the life we choose to live.” - Matthew Kelly

Jon Campo says

What will drive even higher levels of human performance in the 21st century? The answer is: energy management.

Charmin says

Highlights:

1. Become the best version of yourself. Keep making choices in alignment with value structure. It is liberating to choose. If you try to make your value structure the same as your time allocation structure, that’s bad. Value structure influences how I spend my time. Why I do what I do each day.
2. Don’t mortgage your higher priorities for your lower priorities. Figure out what really matters to me and develop a value structure. Learning to live strategically is the first step towards working strategically, and most people in the workforce today lack this fundamental skill.

3. Employees with highly functional person lives are tremendous asset to the company. Measuring something is critical for the process of change and improvement.
 4. Energy management – your experience of life expands with the more energy you have. Your capacity for life increases with the more energy you have. Tiredness reduces capacity for life. Knowing how to balance various activities in our life to produce the maximum flow of energy is perhaps the most important skill of any of us can learn and develop. Control the flow of energy in our lives. Many things in our life serve little or no purpose and drain energy unnecessarily.
 5. Don't ignore the life-giving habits that provide the necessary energy to drive in the modern world. Change the conversation when you get stuck on the wrong question. Explore the best way to start your day and weekend.
 6. A good system is the connection between the behaviors and good outcomes.
In designing a system, you get to direct the way people (yourself) behave. A system allows you to influence what people care about.
 7. Personal clarity leads to professional clarity. Life is a continuum of choices. We are constantly making choices and those choices need perspective. Use priority list in times of decision, shines a light on priorities, situations are constantly changing.
 8. Nobody can be wholly responsible for satisfaction other than ourselves. Once the day gets away from us, we tend to go into survival mode. Core habits of the daily habits that keep you healthy, focus, and energized.
 9. Satisfaction comes from emptying ourselves into things. Working really hard at different times of our life is very good for us. Times are both intense work and complete detachment from work are part of a deeply satisfying life. The most satisfy people tend to have a clear sense of who they are and what is important to them.
 10. If you want to change your life, change the period of time you think about. Give yourself a decade to build a life you have imagined for yourself. There are five facets to the process: assessment, priorities, core habits, weekly strategy session, and quarterly review.
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Joya Cousin says

A short read with a several excellent concepts, which may form the basis for further personal exploration.

The big ideas for me were:

1. Personal and professional satisfaction trumps the idea of finding work-life balance.
2. The purpose of life is to create the best version of ourselves and to pursue only those things and experiences which will produce that result.
3. Our levels of energy drive and are directly correlated to our levels of satisfaction.
4. Creating systems based on priorities/a value system and developing and maintaining core habits is crucial to protecting our energy and creating a life that makes sense to us.

The ideas could have been fleshed out and developed more thoroughly as there is a lot of repetition and the sense that the book was rushed to finish. It is also disappointing to note that we are referred to a website on

three or four occasions for further tools and resources, none of which appear to be any longer available.

Mohammad Jalili says

you feel bigger and more powerful after reading this

Mark says

People looking for more work-life balance may empathize with Lewis Carroll, “the hurrier I go, the behinder I get.” Kelly’s premise is simple: You can’t separate the personal and professional aspects in your life. You can consider them separately to gain insight, but practical separation is impossible. The key is not balance, it is satisfaction. Off Balance often ventures into familiar territory – decide what’s important, have a plan and execute it through discipline and personal accountability. Kelly seems to be challenging the reader to find satisfaction in work so that when those long hours start piling up and hopefully some modicum of professional success, you will feel good about it.

Lara says

I really enjoyed this book, though the assessment questions aren't great in audio format. The author's perspective of the role of work and personal life, how we use them to address our values and develop ourselves, and the (mental) approach to having life satisfaction were described well. The challenge is always that once you identify what's important to you, that making those changes can be difficult. While he spoke about this, I thought there could have been more detail on both identifying values, condensing them, and dealing with life and internal challenges to following them.

Kevin Orpana says

If you have struggled with applying work-life balance to your life, I'd highly recommend this book. Has several helpful tips and exercises as well as a good central thesis of switching focus from managing time to managing your energy; seeking a satisfying life instead of a balanced one; and not feeling guilty of unsuccessfully being "balanced" between life and work due to an unrealistic expectation established by a faulty interpreted concept. Really worth it and I'll revisit it again for pointers.

Noktelfa says

I wouldn't call this book a gold mine... it has some bits of copper, mixed in amongst doggie poo. And not the dry kind that can be set aside for a compost heap. The wet, smelly kind that sticks to the bottom of your shoe and has things growing in it.

The author begins with a story about a man who is satisfied with life, in a story designed to make ambition

look bad. He then spends the rest of the book explaining why happiness is bad and dedication to your employer... not to humanity, not to your family, and certainly not to yourself... is good. At one point he says, "Don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating a 60 hour work week." Then, as if to emphasize his point, he goes on to advocate for a 70 hour work week. He explains why the good stuff in life equates to working extra hours, and makes a case for companies being allowed to direct the personal lives of their employees.

Toward the end of the book, he DOES outline a few steps that MIGHT help bring some success to one's personal life, but they largely amount to living your personal life the way you live your professional life, complete with quarterly reviews by a third party to see how well you're doing.

I'm giving this three stars instead of one because it does have a few useful nuggets, and the author keeps his evangelizing to a minimum, which many who write self-help books on subjects about which they know little can't seem to do. And also, the book was fairly short, so I was able to get it out of the way quickly and move on with my life.

Note to the author: Words have meaning. You think that you can change the meaning of those words to get your subliminal message past the unwary reader, but you're wrong. I understand that, as a devout fascist, you hate all things good, but you won't be able to spread your message very effectively. You lack the intellect. Good try, though.

Lily Clark says

I could not tell you what I took away from this, because it didn't have a clear theme.

Basically this is a condescending book about a man whose wife almost left him but he saw some anonymous person speak on work life balance so now he knows everything there is to work life balance. Weirdly irrelevant personal anecdotes thrown in. Oh! And did you know he knows the meaning of life?!

It feels less a personal development book and more "hey I got my life together somehow and now I know everything in the world! Listen how great I am!"

Toby Brennen says

After being a strong work-life balance advocate for much of the past 15 years, "Off Balance" has been on my 'must read' list for awhile. Oh, how I wish I hadn't waited so long! Within the first 30 pages, Matthew Kelly succinctly lays waste to the work-life balance myth explaining very clearly why he refers to it as the biggest management failure of the last 30 years.

I've read scores of business-think, self-help, professional development books over the years. I have been fortunate to have been introduced to the thinking of some of the most brilliant and innovative minds, of our time, or any era. The struggle I nearly always faced was how to take a great concept and turn it into reality - how to implement an approach that would make a true difference in not only how I did things but how I felt and thought. "Off Balance" not only answers why work-life balance isn't the answer but provides the steps - a guideline for any change you may want to make - simple, straightforward - as long as you can be honest

with yourself. This book began to change my life the moment I finished.

Clearly written. Organized. Methodological. "Off Balance" will benefit anyone but 'systems thinkers' will recognize a kindred spirit and find themselves nodding fervently and frequently. "Off Balance" by Matthew Kelly is clearly a 5 of 5.
