



## News Blog Article Archive

Ron Ashkenas' blog post on Forbes  
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### **Forget Work-Life Balance: It's Time for Work-Life Blend**

Last summer I had an early morning conference call with another consultant and one of his clients. As we were wrapping up, I asked the other two people from where they were calling. One sheepishly said that she was vacationing on the Jersey Shore with her family and had sneaked out early to make the call. The second person admitted that he was on vacation in Martha's Vineyard and had done the same thing. I then confessed that I was calling from western Massachusetts where my family had rented a lake cottage. After a moment of silence, one of us said, "Boy! Are we stupid!" We all laughed as we ended the call – and then presumably went back to our vacations (and our e-mails).

What's interesting about this story is not that we were doing work on our vacations, but rather that none of us questioned the timing of the work call in the first place. We all presumably knew that the call would occur during our holidays, yet no one suggested an alternative date.

The reality for many of us these days is that our [professional lives bleed into our personal lives](#). The boundaries are increasingly permeable and movable. We check our emails in the evenings and weekends. We delay or miss family events because we can't leave the office. And when we do, we take our communications devices with us so that we can stay connected to work.

In [previous posts](#) I've encouraged professionals to manage the work-life balance more proactively by thinking through their priorities and [consciously addressing how work intrudes on their personal lives](#). But in light of how many of us blend work time with personal time, perhaps this advice is overly simplistic – unrealistic even. Maybe we need to accept the fact that the sharp demarcation between work and home is a thing of the past, and that the new normal is a life that integrates home and work more seamlessly.

Focusing on work-life "integration" instead of work-life "balance" has at least a couple of implications: First (and the one that I like the most) is that we can stop feeling guilty about scheduling calls during our vacations or checking our emails at night; and by the same token not feel guilty about talking with our spouses, friends, and family members during work time.



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The second implication is that we no longer split up our time so rigidly between “work hours” and “non-work hours.” Instead, let’s be flexible about when and how we accomplish both our work goals and our personal goals. Obviously some of this has to be negotiated with others, both at work (who is on call for customers?) and home (who gets to use the car?). But the point is to make this a natural part of how we organize our lives instead of a special perk or exceptional situation.

Most organizations of course are not set up to accommodate employees who want to blend their personal and work lives, and in fact actively discourage it through work rules, inflexible hours, and other practices. A number of pilot projects, however, have shown that when teams of interdependent workers (e.g., customer services representatives) are empowered to create their own plans for how and when to get their work done, productivity improves considerably.

So maybe it’s time to rethink not only the way we organize work – but also the way we organize our lives. Instead of pushing back or feeling resentful when work issues interrupt us, let’s accept that interruptions are a part of life; whether they are caused by children, friends, family dramas, broken pipes – or phone calls during our vacations.

*What are your thoughts about the increasing integration of home and work?*

[Ron Ashkenas'](#) blog post on Forbes

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/ronashkenas/2012/10/19/forget-work-life-balance-its-time-for-work-life-blend/>

Editor’s Note: A [version of this blog](#) was cross-posted on HBR.org.