

Work-Life Balance as a Business Owner

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In Search of the Perfect Boundary

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As a business owner and a new mom, I have been thinking about work-life balance a bit more than usual lately.

Any business owner will tell you that living and breathing work is perfectly normal. We work while we're at work. We work while we're at home, and when we're not working, there's a good chance that we're either thinking about work or talking about work. This is because entrepreneurship, for some, for me, can feel very much like a constant adrenaline rush. I love to think about how I can better our services, clinics, and protocols. For example, are we offering the right recommendations for some of our more challenging audiological cases that we see in clinic (i.e., Tinnitus or Hyperacusis)? Are they customized enough? Are we following up enough? Should we have a schedule of appointments for these patients? Or better yet, should we come up with a follow-up or a check-in schedule to ensure they know they are at the top of our minds? Our processes and protocols are always evolving based on what we learn from our patients, our other colleagues in healthcare, and of course, from research. These thoughts definitely keep the wheels turning in my brain and I'm sure in many of my business-owner peers' brains. For this reason, sometimes, as business owners, we forget to pause and have a lunch break, clock out, tune out (though I manage never to forget to pause for that extra cup of coffee).

However, as a woman business owner and a mom, finding that pause can sometimes feel like looking for a needle in a haystack, but it is necessary. I recently gave birth to a little baby boy and already have two little girls at home. I went back into work with my baby when he was 2 weeks old and returned full-time when he was only one month old. He is now our little clinic mascot, and patients love him! He is 4 months old, and they now expect to see a bright-eyed little baby hanging out, thumb in mouth, waiting to greet them, in his baby swing at reception.



A recent article by Agarwal and Lenka (2015) indicated that the motivation to become entrepreneurs is different between men and women. This study suggests that while men are more likely to embrace an entrepreneurship path for financial gain, women do it to achieve a better work-life balance and are more likely to develop more flexible work schedules. A different study by Tahir (2022) suggests the opposite, which is that entrepreneurs seem to have a love for their work and, therefore, seem to have little desire for work-life boundaries. I pondered on the thoughts of these two opposite studies and was interested to learn that I didn't really fit into either of the 'molds' described by these authors above. I don't set a flexible schedule, and while I love my

work, I desire work-life boundaries. I then realized that I have subconsciously developed many boundary-management strategies. Some of the most important ones are: (1) I have a strong support system with my family and my spouse – this is perhaps the most important strategy, particularly because I have young children at home. (2) I have a great team at work – I trust and respect them wholeheartedly because I have developed friendships with my staff. I know they will do a fantastic job to go above and beyond for our patients, but we also have a mutual understanding that we will cover for each other whenever needed should something personal come up and we need to duck out. Recently, I have also been fortunate to lean on them to help with the baby; to hold him and cuddle with him when I'm in with a patient. (3) My work is close to home, so I don't feel like I'm wasting my time, when commuting, and it helps to keep the stress levels to a minimum when I'm on my way to and from work. (4) While it's true that I bring my work home, I also bring my home to work. For example, it is quite common for me to work after the kiddos have gone to bed – read the latest research, respond to emails as needed, etc..., but on the flip side, I share much of who I am as a person with my patients (we talk about our families, our vacations, big life events) which helps to develop a rapport and a sense of trust with them. It also helps to make work feel less like work and less laborious. Plus, I get to bring my baby to work and that is so much fun! The picture above shows one of my patients holding my little baby boy while I program her hearing aids (permission to use this photo was obtained from the patient). 5) I have a strong entrepreneurship identity. Being a business owner; being a mom; working at work and at home; having my home life at home and at work – it all feels natural and smooth and innate to me, and I wouldn't have it any other way. Though I will say that while I am motivated by career growth as Tahir (2022) suggested, I embrace my flexibility when I have it, per Agrawal and Lenka (2015).

References

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