



NICHOLAS FOSTER

7 TOP
WORK-LIFE
BALANCE
MISTAKES

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What's This All About Then

Hi there, my name is Nicholas Foster, and I'm an executive, leadership & career coach.



I spent 15 years as a successful executive leader at Credit Suisse and UBS. During this time, I built and led global teams of over 300 people, managed complex strategic change programmes of up to \$40m and was accountable for one of the most critical trade management systems in the bank.

In parallel to growing this successful career, I got married to my wife Debby and became a dad to two amazing children.

During my long and successful career, I have observed and also made some of the work-life balance mistakes you will read about in this mini eBook. Mistakes that affected me and my colleagues' relationships at home.

I have compiled what I view to be the top 7 work-life balance mistakes made by me, ex-colleagues and clients while scaling our success.

Enjoy

Nick

Mistake #1

YOU DON'T HAVE A WORK-LIFE BALANCE VISION

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat. "I don't much care where -" said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

The Cheshire Cat - Alice in Wonderland

What's your vision for your ideal work-life balance?

What makes this essential now and into the future?

Do you know?

Well, I have a four-step exercise that will help you. I use it a lot with my coaching clients. It gives them clarity on what's important in their life and why.

Give it a try?

Step 1 - Write down whom you want to be i.e.

- Great dad
- Loving husband
- Inspiring leader
- Etc.

Step 2 - Now for each of those identities, write down what you will be doing when you are that person i.e.

If I am a great dad. I will be

- Helping my children with their homework at the weekend and twice during the working week.
- Attending all the important events in my children's life.

Step 3 - Now for each identity write down what you will have now or in the future by doing these things i.e.

If I am a great dad, then:

- My children will understand that I am always there when it matters.
- My children know they can always come to me for help.

Step 4 - Once you have done this for all your identities, then prioritise them, put a plan together and execute.

Mistake #2

YOU CAN'T STOP BEING A HERO

“What got you here won't get you there.”

Marshall Goldsmith

Are you overloaded, continually context switching from email, meetings, projects and conversations? Do you feel like you are never giving your best to anything and are exhausted at the end of the day?

Reactive Zone

If you are, then I bet you are spending too much time in the reactive zone where your time and deadlines are controlled by others. A zone that makes you feel like a hero because you divert a crisis, solve problems and keep everyone happy.

It's easier to do this than the stuff that is going to take too much time to see a result or push you out of your comfort zone. That can wait. Or can it?

Proactive Zone

The hero zone eats your time and energy, will eventually cause burnout and stops you achieving the career success and balanced life that you want.

If you want to control your own workload, then you need to stop being a hero and shift your focus to the proactive zone by delegating or dropping the reactive work.

Drop It

It may be possible to drop some of this reactive work altogether by -

- Technology change
- Process changes
- Hard conversation if the business case does not stack up
- Brainstorming with your team for options

Are You Getting in Your Own Way?

Other than the hero feeling, what else has stopped you delegating this work or dropping it before?

- It's just easier to do it yourself
- You enjoy doing it too much
- It only takes you a minute
- Others won't do it as well
- No one is capable of doing it
- The team is already busy on important work
- What else?

Quick Win

At the end of the transformation shift, you will be able to use your experience to make the most

significant impact on your career as well as find the time and energy you want to spend with your loving family.

It takes a while to make a change like this, so what is this first quick win you can target? If you need an accountability partner, just let me know.

Mistake #3

YOU ALLOW TIME, ENERGY AND FOCUS WASTERS

*“If you love life, don’t waste time, for time is
what life is made up of.”*

Bruce Lee

Do you spend some of your time each day doing the following -

- Checking social media to see what others are doing, which makes you anxious because you end up thinking I should have done that or should be doing that.

- Spend time with people that seem to suck the energy out of you.
- Continuously check email wherever you are - meetings, between meetings, at lunch, on your commute and at home.
- Attend meetings that drag on and never seem to add value.
- Dealing with a continual stream of interruptions because people cannot think for themselves.
- Sitting brain dead in front of the television.

I bet if you wrote down what you did in a day, you would see how much time you spend on the above and on other time, focus and energy wasters.

If you eliminated these time wasters, you would have more focus, more energy and free up some time to get home earlier.

Break Your Habits

Most of the above are habits that you can break, and the easiest way I found to break a habit is to replace it with a positive habit i.e.

- Instead of checking social media all the time, why don't you write social media posts that help others and clarify your thinking?
- Avoid life-draining people and hang out with positive and inspiring people you can learn from. Remember if you are the cleverest in the room, you are in the wrong room.

- Instead of checking your email all the time, batch them up and only spend 2 x 30-minute slots each day dealing with them.
- Avoid pointless meetings by insisting on agendas upfront to determine if you need to be there.
- Replace interruptions by coaching people to think for themselves.
- Television can be a great learning medium, so if you are too tired to do anything else, make sure you watch something you and your family can learn from.

Bonus Productivity Hacks

I have also created a few targeted posts around areas that my clients tell me are the biggest timewasters at work -



[Ten Leadership Hacks to Slash Time Spent in Meetings](#)



[Reduce Email Overload by Curbing Your Addiction](#)



[Why Don't You Just Switch Off Outlook and Go Out and Do Something Less Boring Instead?](#)

Mistake #4

YOU'RE NEVER FULLY PRESENT

“Wherever you are be all there”

Jim Elliot

When you get home, are you still thinking about work?

How often do you check your work emails?

Do you hear yourself saying, “I just need to do this, and I will be with you?”

What impact is this having on the relationships with your family and friends?

To demonstrate, I would like to share a personal and emotional story about the impact of the above had on my little girl.

A Heart-Breaking Evening

When I had a blackberry, I used to respond every time the light at the top blinked red. This would be both at work, at home and sometimes on holiday - but don't tell my wife Debby as she threatened always to throw it in the pool if she caught me.

One dark and wintery evening, I was standing in our hallway at the bottom of our stairs. My young daughter, who was about five years old at the time, was standing at the top of the stairs in her cute and snug little PJs.

The light blinked red on my blackberry. As usual, I started to read the work email. The email instantly stressed me out and put me in a bad mood. At the same time that I was reading the email, my daughter asked me a question.

I snapped immediately at her, and she started to cry. It broke my heart as I saw the tears trickle down her pretty little face.

What an idiot I was. My beautiful little girl with a heart of gold did not deserve this. From that day forward, as soon as I got in from work, the blackberry was thrown in the drawer until the next morning.

Blackberry then faded away and were replaced by bring your own devices to work. A new risk I had to

deal with. At least with a blackberry, I could separate my private and work life, now it was on one device.

Leave It in The Car

A colleague of mine told me about how he has now brought an iPad for work that he leaves in the car when he gets home. He has nothing work-related on his phone. If there is an emergency, they can ring him.

How Can You Be Fully Present?

How can you leave work at work and be fully present for the most important people in your life?

Mistake #5

YOU DON'T SET BOUNDARIES

“Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves even when we risk disappointing others”

Brene Brown

If you don't set and enforce boundaries with others, then they do not understand where the line is e.g. When my boss was replaced, my new boss invited me to a breakfast meeting.

During this meeting, we discussed many things, but one thing I was clear about was my family time. I stated that I start work early, work long hours, but always have the weekends off and spend a few hours with my family every evening. That is unless there is a work emergency.

My boss respected this boundary I put in place and never called me after work or at the weekends. However, he did call my colleagues during these times.

The only time he called me was on a Friday night in 2008. The children had gone to bed, and I was relaxing with a nice glass of red wine. The phone rang, and my wife answered it. She called out that my boss was on the phone. My heart sank as I knew it had to be something urgent and vital. It was the Friday night before Lehman's collapsed and he was asking if I could attend a conference call on Saturday morning with the head of operations and his team to work out a plan for Monday.

Exercise

Write down a set of boundaries you would like to set with yourself and others. These should align with the work-life vision you have defined in mistake #1.

Here are some examples -

- I don't work at the weekends so that I am able recharge after a tough week with my family and friends.
- I will only attend late evening conference calls once a week, so I can still participate in New York meetings and have the other evenings with my family.
- I won't accept calls past 6 pm unless it's urgent, so I can bath the children and read them a

bedtime story.

- I won't look at your work emails past 6 pm so I can be more present with my family.
- I will always take an hour for lunch so I can clear my head and be more focussed for the afternoon.

Now socialise these with those you want to set them with and going forward remind them or yourself of the boundary if it's overstepped.

Mistake #6

YOU DON'T TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

*“Take care of your body. It’s the only place
you have to live.”*

Jim Rohn

When you get home from a hard day’s work tired and ratty, you are greeted by excited children who are also tired and ratty because it’s close to their bedtime. You tuck them up into bed and feel like you should do some exercise but make up an excuse not to. You cook dinner, but don't have the energy to cook something healthy, so you throw together whatever is quickest. You then sit brain dead in front of the television with your partner, dinner, a glass or two of wine and some chocolate as a feel-good treat.

This was me; I was stuck in this self-perpetuating cycle for years and weighed in at uncomfortable 95kg. I now weigh in at 76kg and look and feel ten years younger. I did this by changing my eating, drinking and exercise habits.

Eat Well & Exercise

Looking after yourself by eating well and exercising can help you -

- Be more focussed and productive.
- Give you more energy in everything you do especially running around with the children at the park.
- Manage stress and fight burnout.

- Take away those aches and pains you get every day that makes you feel like you are older than your years.
- Feel better about yourself.
- Keep you around longer for those children of yours.
- + Many more...

Struggling to Change

Today there are many cost-effective and time-saving services out there that make it easy for you
i.e.

- Hello Fresh allows you to select healthy recipes each week for you and your family. They will deliver all the ingredients in a box with instructions on how to prepare in less than 30 minutes.
- A personal trainer is good for helping you focus on the exercise that is right for you and will keep you motivated and accountable.
- Save time with a gym at home. I use a home gym as I do not want to waste time travelling to a gym. I do 20-30 minutes of body weight exercises or HIIT from an iPhone app. I treat it like having a shave, I get it over with first thing in the morning and then focus on the rest of my day.

Find something that works for you, take it slow, find someone to do it with and find a way to have fun.

Mistake #7

YOU DON'T PLAN OUTSIDE OF WORK

“Fail to Plan, Plan to Fail.”

Benjamin Franklin

Your successful, so there is no doubt you are good at short, medium and long-term planning. But do you ever plan what you should be doing outside of work?

I was terrible at this, I could plan a \$40m programme and a team of 300 people, but I was awful at making plans with my family and friends.

Without planning life outside of work, you leave it to the last minute, end up doing nothing unusual or end up relying on your partner or friends to arrange

it for you. But if they're too busy, what happens then?

Life is too short and precious not to plan for, so take back control of your life and start planning it. Take your work calendar and add the following across the entire year so you can schedule your work around them -

- The holiday you want to take with your family even if it's not booked yet.
- Events happening this year that you cannot miss, especially Birthdays and your anniversary.
- School term holidays, can you take a few days off?
- Special partner time.
- Days that you could leave early and surprise your family.

- Energising friend time.
- The time when you want to make phone calls to loved ones or to catch up with your friends.
- The time when you could do a face time call to help the kids with their homework or to tell them you love them and are thinking about them.
- Weekend plans.
- Time to take care of yourself - lunch for one, self-development, gym, etc.

Bonus Tip

Why not hire a part-time virtual personal assistant to help you plan all the above? It would save you time, take away a lot of hassle and help you gain some brownie points.

Can you imagine that after making a short phone call to your PA, a restaurant is booked, babysitters arranged, and an Uber is on its way to pick up your partner. How cool would that be?

DID ANYTHING RESONATE?

“Without knowledge action is useless and knowledge without action is futile.”

Abu Bakr

Did you find the mini eBook useful?

You did.

If you are like me, you read lots of useful information. Get inspired to take some action, but then get busy again with work and forget to follow up.

As the above quote says - “knowledge without action is futile.”

So, before you get busy again, let's ensure you commit to one small action you can complete over the next two weeks. Take one of the actions in this document that you want to execute -

- Write it down.
- Set a completion date.
- Commit to someone who will hold you accountable.

If you cannot find someone to hold you accountable, then email it to me at nick@nicholas-foster.com, and I will challenge you to get it done.

Additional Resources

Career Success Articles - [click here](#)

LinkedIn Career Success Posts - [click here](#)

Other Insightful Resources - [click here](#)



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