

From The Times
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Work-Life

How is your work-life balance? You can't succeed unless it is good, says US life coach, who gives 'laser coaching' Times readers. Here she talks to a communications consultant. Ginger Cockerham

Catherine Rogers, 45, a communications consultant, lives in Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, with her company-director husband and their three children Jack, 9, Annie, 8, and Mia, 6. Before the children, she managed a bird-watching resort in the Guyana rainforest and later ran her own youth expedition company. "I loved it, but it was never going to fit in with family life." She set up her current business, which she runs from home, after doing an MA in neuro-linguistic programming (NLP).

"There was a niche for distilling what I had learnt into a day-long course on communication and team-building for professionals and also parent groups." The courses have been well received by clients and the business is growing rapidly by word of mouth.

Catherine also does one-to-one coaching in NLP techniques and runs a small property portfolio. "I am not guilt-ridden because I make sure the children come first, but I do feel that although I am doing lots of things, I am not doing any of them fully. Now that my youngest child is at school, I have more time to work, but never seem to get through my to-do list. For months I've meant to organise a website and brochure, but I haven't." She wants to work for income, and keep her mind active, but knows that her working life lacks structure. "I have so many things I want to do, but am not setting aside the time to do them. My life seems as busy as ever, but not half as 'sexy' as it was in the jungle."

Catherine's typical day 6am-6.30am Get up, shower, get dressed. Husband helps with breakfast before leaving at 6.45. Jack, who is dyslexic, needs ten minutes' help morning and evening with exercises from the Dore Foundation, which must be done before he heads for the school bus.

8am Leave the house with Annie and Mia. The school run is an hour-long round trip, but I may have a quick coffee with another mum. On Thursdays, I stay behind to hear readers at school.

9.30am-noon If I don't have a work commitment, my priority is exercise. I spin on Mondays, play tennis Tuesdays and netball Wednesdays. It's my me-time.

Noon-2pm See a coaching client. Grab lunch. Unless I'm out, I'll eat on the move.

2pm-3.30pm Check e-mails, make phone calls, do prep for a lecture, chores. Our au pair helps with cleaning and cooking for the children.

3.30pm-6pm Pick up children. Taxi them to cricket, drama, football or tea with a friend. Organise supper.

6pm-8.30pm. Homework, reading, bath and bedtime for children.

9pm. Sit down with husband to eat, but not for long; there is always something to do: school uniforms, e-mails. I rarely watch TV, but I try to read. I belong to a book club.

10.30pm-11.30pm Crash out. I never have problems getting to sleep.

Ginger says . . .

Catherine said that just answering questions about her schedule was a powerful experience. She realised that by fitting work around her family she is staying true to her values and priorities. So she stopped beating herself up about that. Although she misses those adventures of paddling through the jungle, for now she is making the best choices for her family. In coaching we call that "present perfect".

She wouldn't be doing anything but what she is doing right now. On that strong foundation, she is free to make choices about how to use the extra time she has now that her youngest child is at school.

I asked: "What in your work would give you the most satisfaction to achieve?" She said developing her website. I asked how she had achieved something extraordinary in the past. She said she had developed her course by having a deadline, then setting aside time to work on it regularly.

When we talked about a deadline for getting the website up, she made one without hesitation: June 30, 2008. I asked how that was going to happen. She said grabbing time wasn't working. When she developed her course she got it done but recalled that every time she went back to it, she felt she had taken a step backwards.

We discussed mind mapping, a performance tool with which Catherine is already familiar. She will use it to capture the project steps for the website so that she will have the structure in place when she returns to it.

Coach's note: Catherine described herself as a "finisher" so all she needed was a plan. The laser coaching made her confident that she will accomplish her work goal because she has a structured process in place that she can return to around the random time she has available.

If you would like to be laser-coached by Ginger, e-mail worklife@thetimes.co.uk with your name, address, phone numbers and a brief explanation of what you do. Participants must agree to the interview and Ginger's advice being published in The Times 101207, and pay for the 15-minute call to Texas themselves.