

# **Work@Home: Finding the New Balance**

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Growing up, is there anyone who liked homework? Even as we became adults, whenever a difficult boss or a client dished out unwelcome assignments, we groaned about the monster and the “homework”. Home is meant for putting the leg up, for many, particularly the men folk. But with Covid-19, everything has changed dramatically and work at home is the new normal. The release from commute does bring welcome relief, and there are other advantages. But after the initial joy of the zoom calls with button-down shirt above the waist and pajamas below, many are getting restless. A new problem has come up. Funny, it has to do with the age-old fib about work-life balance. When work invades home, it is a brand-new quagmire. Did we all not say, do not ever bring work home? Keep the office outside when you step in? So, what do we do now?

The first thing is, stop whining. More you recognize something as vile and painful, more it would tie around you like a slithery serpent. On the other hand, if you say, the idea of work from home is here to stay and that you are okay with it, you will find yourself to be more accepting and hence, find yourself resourceful. Accept the “home-work” as much as you have accepted the mask and the hand sanitizer. The camel is in the tent now. Make place. But know what? There are mistaken notions about work and the so-called work-life balance. Home or no-home.

All my life, I have told young leaders to shed the idea of work-life balance. I believe, people who complain about work-life balance, first and foremost, need to get a life. People who complain the most are those who have no serious passion, no commitment to the kitchen knife and the vacuum cleaner at home. These are the channel-surfers who do not actually know what they are watching. So, first get a life and you would see how magically, even between the zoom calls, the green shoots will show up.

Yesterday, my nephew Durga Prasad Das sent me an adorable video of him singing along while lovely daughter Anna was letting her fingers float above

the piano. It was magical. My nephew is a consultant and Anna a student; both are indefinitely trapped in a strange new reality. But they are building beautiful memories for the future! Every such performance of the duo would be watched by Anna's children even fifty years from now. So, do find the green shoots of true joy.

The next thing to do is to "distribute" yourself. Give yourself away. Give yourself in many different directions, to many different people. It is amazing how therapeutic that can be. My daughter Neha is in her second year at the University, doing a 3-year course in fine arts. A brand-new batch is coming in now and what is she doing? She is building a website, by herself, for all the newcomers who are anxious about the altered reality of formal education. Neha ran sessions from home for the newbies and suddenly, she found community. Neha has never been in so much joy! She is not complaining. She is giving herself away in small bits. But on our part, you, and I, do not have to do that to "distribute" ourselves. I can distribute myself by teaching spoken English to the maid at home, you can push the missus out of the kitchen for the evening or teach granny how to download music. Distributing yourself can also mean a short WhatsApp call with a friend you have not met in months. It could mean sending your neighbour a bunch of flowers from your garden, tied in a jute string at home or, simply suspending the stupidity of forwarding inane messages. Instead, watch an Animal Planet video. But do it with purpose.

The other thing I always tell young leaders is that people do not die of hard work; people die of boredom. That idea is truer than ever before. Right now, we are nursing our house-help, Archana at our home. She has tested Covid positive. The folks from Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation came to check on her. A young physician, Dr Siba Sankar Padhy and his assistant came on a hot sweltering afternoon. This was one of two dozen calls they were doing that day. It has been months and no guessing how long they would have to continue their work. *That* is hard work. In contrast, what work-life balance am I seeking, doing zoom meetings in pajamas?

Folks, where am I going with all this? The starting point is, stop sympathizing with yourself. Sympathize with others. Build appreciation for your spouse, your maid, your driver, the milkman, your newspaper guy and suddenly you would find that work is not a curse. Not something to be worried about as long as you intersperse it with ways to distribute yourself, to give yourself away in abandon, in small, everyday things. And friends, before I sign off, I have this to say: know that occasionally it is okay to feel frustrated, to feel

down, to be confused. Know that all of us are navigating a course without a verified map. But someday, we will see land. Until then, let us float above the chaos.