



Glain Roberts-McCabe sat down with Roundtable Member, **Amy Laski**, Founder and President of Felicity [Inspiring Communications], to get her perspective on how to achieve life balance while still demonstrating commitment to your work.

Mentoring **MATTERS**

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I work in a fast, paced, demanding work environment where the sensitivity for “life balance” is low. The expectation is that the demands of the business will always come first. How can I make space for my personal priorities without it seeming that I am not committed to the business?

When Glain and her team asked me to share my thoughts on this question, my initial response was, "I'll do my best, however, my personal experience when my work-life balance was off kilter was to strike out on my own! And, I've built my organization on the foundation of balance."

Upon further reflection, I realized that the factors that led me to found my own company combine to create a powerful lens that can be applied by others.

To me, "balance" is both delicate and binary: you are either in balance, or you aren't. Life by its very nature defies balance. That's why I prefer the term "work-life integration." I've built my company on this foundation. At Felicity we haven't simply accepted that work is inevitably creeping into our personal lives (and vice versa). We embrace it wholeheartedly.

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We use technology and a mindset that enables around-the-clock connectedness. This can be both a blessing, and a curse. This more seamless integration allows you to work where and when you are most productive, or bigger picture, take care of an elderly relative or new baby without missing a career beat.

However, to truly achieve "work-life integration," you need more than internet access. Dig deeper. What is underpinning the feeling that it is lacking?

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In my experience, GUILT is a major driver of feeling like work is paramount. Guilt that you ought to put in overtime to show you are eager to advance, take on extra projects to stretch your capabilities and add transferrable skills to your resume. You should. So you do.

Examining the real and potential sources of your guilt will help empower you to set the standard for your work-life integration.

Consider these three sources of guilt:

1. Organizational The workplace's norms and expectations can be set up as an ideal "breeding ground" for guilt. For instance, in the corporation where I worked, meetings were called early in the morning and began late in the day, often at the last minute, without regard to outside obligations. If you're in a similar situation, the more people that are involved in the organization and its many, many meetings, the more difficult it can be to shift the boundaries.

2. Managerial An organization's leaders can lay on guilt thicker than my even my mother can. For me, I knew I was going to be working for someone who placed a strong emphasis on face time, on perceived input versus actual output and results. Sound familiar?

3. Self An organization's culture or leaders may be the ones who dictate norms around the acceptance of balance, but ultimately the onus rests on your ability to set boundaries. The pull of technology and pavlovian reaction to the "ding" of an email is so strong it takes willpower and our own good habit-forming to resist. While I was uncertain if my new leader would impose her personal expectations on me, one thing I did know was that there was a high probability that it would be difficult for me not to feel guilty, even if that guilt came from within.

Once you've identified the sources of guilt, examine their relative strength and determine what you can do to quiet internal guilt and manage external sources. Consider building in personal time at lunch, set weekly meetings with your boss to ensure regular face time and updates, and be prepared to say no.

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For me, this process led me to approach my boss with a flexible work arrangement proposal. The best case scenario would be: set boundaries and the space I sought for personal priorities. But going into the conversation I also knew my BATNA: Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement, which in classic negotiation theory means, "the most advantageous alternative course of action a party can

take if negotiations fail and an agreement cannot be reached." For me, it came down to either a more flexible arrangement in my current organization, or my BATNA, leaving the organization for one that would enable more flexibility. Determine your BATNA before having this conversation.

In the end, the response was that while the organization hoped I would continue working there, but my role required a full-time commitment that could not accommodate the flexibility I was looking for. I suppose that's where the saying "when one door closes, another opens" is fitting, as without this pivotal moment, I would not have founded my company. Our virtual, flexible model fills a void in the marketplace that I experienced as a client at the large, inflexible organization.

Certainly, I still experience guilt on a daily basis as a business owner, mother, daughter and spouse. But, I have gotten much better at applying these three "guilt lenses" to identify whether it is self-inflicted or external, then managing the situation accordingly. You can too!



Amy Laski is founder and president of Felicity [Inspiring Communications], a virtual communications and content agency based in Toronto. At Felicity, teams are custom-tailored to meet clients' objectives, and clients invest in brains, not bricks. Felicity's unique inreach (vs. outreach) approach harnesses the power of your most important stakeholders and influencers to develop your best brand narrative. Amy draws on 15+ years of experience with the world's leading brands to drive breakthrough impact for clients. Prior to starting Felicity, Amy worked at the world's largest beverage company and at two other leading Canadian PR agencies.

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Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.