

DEVIANT THINKING PODCAST

Episode 10 - THE MYTH OF WORK LIFE BALANCE



Transcript

See show notes at: www.deviantthinking.com/podcast/010

00:00 Welcome back to the Deviant Thinking podcast. I'm your host Jennifer Thompson today and always we'll explore career advice that breaks the rules. Before we hop into today's podcast, I want to address a question that I've been asked recently and it's about why I'm so big on breaking the rules and what does it really mean? Well, for me, breaking the rules means stepping out and trying something different, taking risks. Often the rules that I'm talking about are the rules that are set up as conventional wisdom that's shared with us by very, very well meaning people, but that keep us stuck overall in society, we work really hard to keep people safe. It's really part of our DNA, but that safety doesn't often serve us. Safety keeps us stuck and I want my clients to flourish, so I really encourage breaking the rules. What are some of those rules?

01:08 Well, it really can be anything. One of the things I've been hearing a lot lately is about really focusing on one thing, being really good at one thing and honing that in and being amazing. Right. That sounds like really, really awesome advice. Well, when I've really looked at that and broke it down, it really hit me that, especially for myself, that focusing on one thing actually didn't help me in my career. It was the diversity of experiences that really allow me to flourish. So then I started examining what else was out there in the world and what did other people do who were really, really successful. And as I started looking, I kind of got a chuckle because a lot of wildly successful people really haven't focused on one thing. You know what would've happened if Elon Musk focused on one thing? You know, he would only have focused on the Tesla, a really great thing to focus on, but he's focused on multiple things.

02:13 He's got space X, he's got the organization that does solar panels. He's done so

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many things and is wildly successful. Another great person who has not focused has been Jeff Bezos. And whether you like the way Jeff Bezos runs his company or not, the reality of it is Amazon's been wildly successful. But if Jeff Bezos only focused on one thing, Amazon would only be a book seller. There's tons of examples of this. Another favorite of mine is Richard Branson. What if Richard Branson only focused on one thing. All right? We might have a great record store. Hmm. Wonder if that would still be around. But we have so many other great Virgin products. You know, we all love the thought of doing a Virgin flight across the ocean because they offer such great hospitality. They've just recently launched Virgin cruise lines. They've diversified into many, many areas, and that's what makes that organization great.

03:19 So I hope you can see that that idea of focusing, which is that conventional wisdom that we all hear over and over again, focus on one thing and be really good at it, might not make a whole lot of sense. And how many other rules are you following that are keeping you stuck, that sounds like a fabulous advice? Well, that takes us to today's episode. In today's episode, it's all about busting the myth around work life balance. What is this unicorn that we're being taught to chase and will we ever find it? And is it what we even want? This is a mythical utopia for most people and it's something that people really focus on where it's interesting to me because it's not that hours put in that's important. It's really the quality of the work that you're doing and are you engaged in? Are you excited?

04:25 What I know is that my clients who are asking about work life balance have an imbalance in their values and their priorities to the work that they're doing. My clients who are aligned with their values and aligned with their priorities are never asking this question. It's those who really are out of that values alignment that they're focused on the number of hours. So I want to take some time today and really look at what does it mean to have a great work life balance. Well, first of all, a work life balance for everyone is a bit different. Yes, there is no magic formula that tells us that if we work eight hours a day, which is also another one of those made up rules, some where back in our society, we decided that the perfect work day was eight hours and we would work five days a week.

05:26 Yup. Someone made that up. So we have this myth that if we work only those eight hours that we're going to find this magical work life balance. Well again, what I know is that I have clients who work 60 or 70 hours a week, but they don't feel like it's work. They're passionate about what they do, they're excited, they're in engaged, and that work somehow balances out and they love every bit of it. In contrast, I have clients who work part time, who only work 20 hours a week, who feel like they're still overworked, who still feel like they're overwhelmed and aren't engaged and are chasing that mythical work life balance. So the first thing I want to consider is, is it really all about hours? My guess is it's not actually. It probably has very little to do with the hours that you work. It has a lot more to do with are you able to exercise your values?

06:33 Yup. I'm talking about values once again on this show and you're going to hear

me talk about values in almost every episode that we do because I really do believe it is the building blocks for a life that can allow us to flourish. So I want everyone to take a second and think about that question of work life balance. Is it the number of hours that you're putting in or is it the work that you're doing doesn't align with what you're best at and what you're passionate about? One of my favorite quotes is "do what you love and you will never have to work a day in your life." I've found it really interesting, as I was researching for this podcast, I wanted to know who that quote was attributed to. What was super interesting about this was that this quote actually attributed to quite a few people.

07:28 Everyone from Confucius. So back in ancient Chinese history to uh, Mark Anthony to our modern day Mark Twain. So this concept has been around for millennia and, and I think that's really interesting because I think it says so much about, again, that idea of work life balance. If you find work that you love, you will never work a day in your life and you're going to be happy and content. So back to the value side of things. And how do you know if your values are contributing to your work life balance? Well, there's some great work out there done by Martin Seligman who is the father of positive psychology. And Martin Seligman talks about a PERMA model. And this PERMA model is a model of wellbeing. And he says that when you're able to use your values, then you're able to flourish. And for him, those flourishing building blocks are positive emotions.

08:34 So when you like what you do, right, so when you're doing what you value, you have positive emotions and you feel good. It's engagement. So engagement is being completely absorbed in the activities you're doing. So again, that comes from doing things that you value and that you're good at. Relationships are part of it. And relationships, again, you have the best relationships with people who share similar values or at least they respect and allow you to use your values on a daily basis. Meaning. So meaning is all about that purposeful existence. So again, when we're doing what we value, it becomes a lot easier to have meaning in the work that we do. And then the last piece of the PERMA model is achievement. And again, when we're achieving great things, often it's because we're working with things that align to our values. So again, going back over that just real quick, it's this idea that in positive psychology that if you're using your values and strengths every day that contributes to the building blocks, which are the PERMA model.

09:47 So that was positive emotions. So P, E engagement are relationships, M meaning and A achievements. So now going back to the idea of work life balance and if you really look at work life balance from that perspective of are your values being honored and met and are you able to use those strengths every day? It makes us, makes it a lot easier to look and determine do we really have that work life balance that we're trying to go for? Is it really a utopia or is it something that we can achieve? Well, I do believe we can achieve it. And if I've peaked your interest about Martin Seligman and the ideas of positive psychology and values and flourishing, he has some great books available, the first of which is Authentic Happiness, which really sets a foundation for looking at your values. And then his second book, Flourish.

10:51 And I've linked to both of those in the show notes as well as I've linked to scribed, which scribed as my favorite way to devour great books. And there is a link there that can get you two months free. So it is an affiliate link. Um, but it does offer a really, really great value to read some awesome books as well. So those, those books can give you some additional insight on really identifying your values and how do they apply to that overall happiness and, and really feeling good about the work that you do.

11:26 So back to work life balance. So, how do you find work life balance? How do you know what that looks like for you? Well, for everyone, I believe that work life balance is very different. You know, if you are young in your career and you're just starting out, you may be super enthusiastic about putting a lot of time into work.

11:48 And it's where you get excited and you're learning and you're growing. It is wonderful if you're getting to work and, and really grow your, your abilities. I once had a manager come to me and she was all stressed out. We had a young team member who was working, she said until 10 o'clock every night. And this just had her perplexed and frustrated and she said, you know, she's, she doesn't have good work life balance. So I've really challenged that thinking. And I said, well, is that true? Is she happy and content in the work that she's doing? Is she using that time to learn and grow her skills? Why is she here until 10 o'clock is it to improve herself or is it because we're giving her busy work in this team members case? It really was, she was working to grow herself. We weren't giving her extra busy, busy work.

12:42 She really wanted to be amazing at her job and to do that, she wanted to ramp up quickly so she put in the extra hours and you know, over the years of her career, I watched this person slow down and, and really start to balance things out. But at that moment, for her, the balance meant working more. In the same sense, I watch older team members, you know, who have more commitments at home, who have earned their stripes, who have learned what they're doing, you don't need to put in less time. And they're really happy with that because their skills are really, really solid. You know, when we changed to a new role, sometimes it means upping our, our hours again. Or if we're working on a new project or if we're working, you know, on a calendar cycle that we have peaks and valleys. And it's all okay.

13:35 Don't buy into the myth that this work life balance has to be some perfect number. You know that you're only working 40 hours a week, that you have so many hours with friends and family. Really determine for yourself what that looks like. And again, if you're doing work that you love and that aligns with your values, chances are you're not going to be stressed out about this as much because you're doing the things that you love to do. Now there's another side to work life balance as well and that's time management. So I don't want to skip over that. So time management can also throw us off. So really the first thing that throws us off on that work life balance is doing work that doesn't align. But the second thing is time management. But interestingly enough, I find that most people's problems with time management also comes down to values.

14:31 What I find is that most people waste time when they're trying to avoid tasks that

they don't love. They're getting away from pain. I know I'm totally guilty of this myself. If I have to do something that doesn't align with my values, suddenly Facebook looks much more interesting or shuffling things around on my desk look much more interesting or spending countless hours in the time suck of email. All of those things look much more interesting if I'm not doing something that aligns with my values. So I really encourage you to think of time management in a new light of trying to align things on a daily basis that align with those values. And even, I even trick myself a little bit in this, so if I have a task I don't love to do or I perceive myself as not loving to do, if I can take that task and say, Oh, how do I approach it creatively?

15:36 Right? That's one of my values. How do I learn something? Also another one of my values. Suddenly that task doesn't become as daunting. I can focus much more and I can get it done in a quicker way. Now, all of this doesn't excuse companies that put way too many tasks on employees. So I'm not saying everyone has the ability to change their work life balance. There really are crappy companies out there that take advantage of their employees. And if you are in that spot, that's when you need to really step back, figure out your game plan and figure out how you're going to get with a company that aligns better with your values. But for most of my clients, I find that even if they're in the process of looking for another job, they still have to focus on this idea of values and using their time wisely to really, again, focus on the things that they do best.

16:35 So how do you know if you go to a new company, you won't be stuck in the same spot? It's a question I get very often from clients. They want to make sure that they have work life balance and their next role. So again, most of the time I'm being asked this question because their current role doesn't align to their values. Well, I'm going to tell you straight up asking about work life balance and an interview to me is a big red flag as some as a hiring manager. Often that says to me, I have an employee that's burnt out and not excited to be here. I think it lowers your chances of getting a job. So it's a question I don't want to see clients ask. I don't want to see you ask that simple question. What's the work life balance around here? You may have that volunteered in an interview from the interviewer.

17:31 That happens a lot because that's a selling point from their side. If the culture supports people really being able to have families and so on. But I think the question really comes down to what are the company's values and are their values going to align with yours? And if family is one of your values, you want to know if their value of family is there too. So asking questions around their values. You'll learn a lot more about work life balance than you will by simply asking that question. Cause similar to that question that we talked about in in the company culture. One, are you a fit? If you ask the question, what's the company culture around here, you're going to get the canned answer. In the same way, if you ask what's the work/life balance around here, you're going to get the canned to answer.

18:23 So you want to dig a level deeper and figure out what's their values and how will that impact your work. So I go back to that same question that I love to ask companies.

It's about what's, what's the greatest success that they've had recently. It really gets to that heart of the values. It allows people to talk about what was important to the organization, what they measure, what they see as success. Then it allows you to ask really, really great follow up questions that might give you hints to the work life balance. So once you get someone talking about that success, you can ask a simple question like, well wow, that's amazing. What did it take to get there? How do, how did you guys do that? If you're hearing that they worked every night until midnight for six months, it might not align with your values and you might want to step back in the same sense.

19:19 That same team might say yeah, for the last six weeks we worked every night till midnight. This team was so engaged they didn't want to go home. They've been super excited about this project and we've seen it come to fruition and you know what, as a reward we gave them a few days off to recoup because they really knocked it out of the park. Hmm, Very different answers even though both of them might've been there working till midnight. And again, I am absolutely not encouraging working till midnight, but I do encourage you thinking about how do you align those values with the work that you want to do.

19:58 So kind of as a wrap up for today's session, I went through a lot and I hope you see that this was another rule breaking session in talking about our work life balance. So work life balance. Is it something that you really want?

20:12 Is it this utopia that's out there? What does it mean to you and is it really the hours that you're putting in? My bet is now it's really that alignment of values, so stepping back and seeing are your values being honored? Are you working on work that allows you to be engaged, build relationships, have meaning and achieve. If you're not doing those things, then you need to step back and determine one, how do you infuse the work that you do with your values? That's always a possibility. You can always step back and say, how do I up it? How do I bring my best game? How do I bring something different to the table so that I can be engaged? So that's option number one. Option number two is, Nope, this company's never going to meet my values and I'm not having a work life balance because I'm not engaged in the work that I'm doing.

21:08 Then you have to step back, be clear on your values and create a plan to move on to an organization that will allow you to exercise your values on a daily basis. Then the second side of it is, well I don't even know if it's a second side of it because it really still does come back to values. How are you using your time? Are you doing the things that you value in that time or are you being asked to do tasks that don't have purpose, that don't have meaning? And if you are, again, can you tweak those so that you are using your time more wisely or if there is no way around it, do you have to step back? So I hope you've enjoyed today's episode. It's been fun talking about some rule breaking strategies yet again, if you love this podcast, I would so appreciate it if you'd head on over to iTunes and give us a review. Also, I would love to hear how you break the rules or questions that you have that maybe I can give you some rule breaking advice. Bye for now, and I look forward to our next episode.