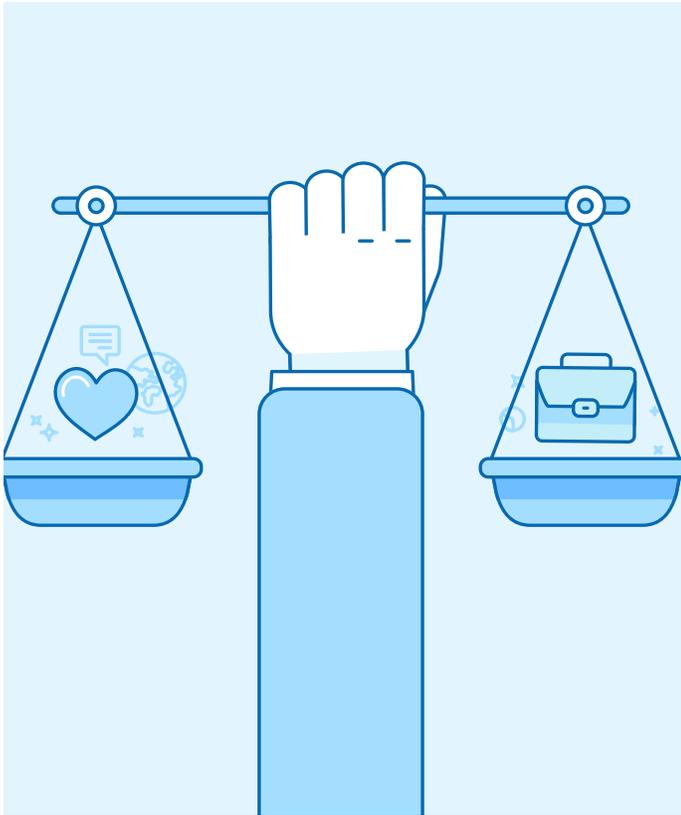


# Time Out! Revolutionizing the Way We Think About Work-Life Balance

By Natalie Loeb, David Robert & David B. Sarnoff, Esq.



## Can you relate to this?

“Another call?” Kevin grumbled as he glanced down at his cellphone. “I can’t even take a day off anymore.” He placed his hand on the phone, which had been lying quietly next to a now half-empty cup of coffee and silenced it. “Sorry about that,” he said before returning to our conversation.

“Things must be busy at your office,” I said, trying to make Kevin feel less guilty about the interruption. I considered Kevin a close friend, but we hadn’t seen each other in weeks. I was excited when he called earlier in the week to invite me to lunch. We had a lot to catch up on, but I was most interested in hearing about Kevin’s new role at the firm.

“Director of Operations!” I said. “That’s a big responsibility.”

“Yeah, tell me about it,” he chuckled. “I love what I do. I just wish I wasn’t under so much stress.”

“So what are you doing to take care of yourself?” I asked. I was curious to understand what Kevin was prioritizing during his workday.

“Well, I’m using some of my vacation days. Although as you can see by the calls from work, there’s really no such thing as a day off.” He leaned over and took a sip of his coffee before tapping his cellphone to check whether someone had called. “Oh, and I joined a gym,” he added. “The firm is paying for it. Although, I’ve only been twice because I work so late now but at least it’s something.”

I took a deep breath and sighed loudly. “What?” he asked.

“That’s not really what I meant by the question. Lots of firms offer vacation time, and gym memberships, and a slew of other perks,” I added. “But obviously they’re not working.” I was surprised Kevin raised his eyebrows. “The last few times I’ve spoken with you, you’ve shared how many hours you’re working and how much stress that’s causing you. So what are you doing to take care of yourself *while* you’re at work?”

Kevin glanced down at his coffee for a few seconds and then scanned the room as if he was confused by the question. “No one can operate at full throttle all of the time,” I said pointedly.

Kevin wrinkled his nose. “David, it’s not that simple.” He sat up and moved his coffee cup to the side. “I oversee a function that supports hundreds of attorneys who are under at least as much stress as I am. Maybe more.” I remained silent to encourage him to continue. “Those attorneys are working 60 or 70 hours a week to meet client demands or court deadlines. I have to make sure they’re successful.”

I felt bad laughing but I had to remind Kevin that as a coach who has worked with dozens of law firms across the globe, I understood the demands of life at a firm. “There are things

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you can do immediately to reduce your stress," I offered. "Think about the impact your stress is having on the people who look to you for guidance and support. This can't be setting a great example."

"What advice do you have, then?"

I took full advantage of the opening. "For starters, you can stop calling it work-life balance. As soon as we default to the mindset that work is first, we begin to prioritize work over the quality of our life." That didn't seem to convince Kevin.

"Consider this," I said. "When we prioritize our personal well-being, we are more likely to set aside even a small amount of time for things like meditation, exercise, a separation from email, eating healthy, and sharing a laugh or two with a colleague."

I reached my hand out and placed it on top of Kevin's cellphone. "And when we get into the habit of prioritizing our well-being, we are more likely to leave work at work. That's true life-work balance."

"And I'm in full control of that," Kevin confirmed.

"Yes! I set aside two 10-minute slots every workday. I call it 'time out.' Sometimes I listen to music. Sometimes I call a friend who can make me laugh. And sometimes I do absolutely nothing. But I always do it."

"That's a great idea," Kevin replied. "I think I'll start doing that tomorrow."

"I'm glad to hear that," I said. "So let's keep the momentum going by putting our next lunch date on the calendar right now!" ■

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Natalie Loeb** is the Founder of Loeb Leadership Development Group. With more than 25 years of experience in executive coaching and known as an innovative business leader and strategic partner to her clients, she is a thought leader on leadership within the legal world and is regularly approached for her developed expertise by a variety of organizations.



**David Robert** is Chief Strategy Officer with Loeb Leadership Development Group. Robert brings nearly 20 years of experience to Loeb Leadership as a thought leader in the areas of learning and development, talent management, and change management. Robert has held both internal and external consulting positions at companies across several industries and is the former Chief Executive Officer of Great Place to Work (Middle East).



**David B. Sarnoff, Esq.**, is an Executive Coach and Leadership Trainer with Loeb Leadership Development Group. As a former attorney and experienced executive search consultant, Sarnoff is uniquely qualified and experienced to understand the mindset, demands and challenges of attorneys and legal professionals. He has worked with attorneys at all levels in a variety of practice areas, in law firms and in-house.

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