

# Preface

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*If I'm such a success, why isn't my life feeling more manageable? If my life is so ideal on paper, why do I still have this nagging concern that relationships between work and home could be improved for the better? I know I can make some changes to improve things, but I just keep doing things the same old way.*

*Dan, 31, sales manager with a five year old*

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If you have asked yourself a question similar to this one you're not alone. Today, many accomplished individuals still feel dissatisfied with the quality of their lives. Building a life that works better for you on and off the job means believing that you are the CEO of your life starting today. This will enable you to create a better working life and make changes—many often small and simple—that will enable you to gain more control over how you manage your many commitments, at work and at home. You will understand by reading this book the new rules for managing work and personal life, the first and foremost being that we are the masters and mistresses of our fate. We can make better choices; we are not subject to the whims of our overcommitted schedules, and the laptops and cell phones that allow us to work anywhere, anyplace, and any time. We will provide you a new way of thinking and a framework so that you can learn how to make better choices to make your life better.

Like many working individuals, you always strive to do well in your job, take care of your home, and achieve a satisfying personal life. But how? Lately does it seem like your personal and work life are colliding more and more? Sure, most of us have the flexibility to check e-mail at home as we let the dog out or get the kids ready for school. We are used to calling our boss in the car while commuting and text messaging our next appointment—it's a given that the nature of work in our daily life has changed. We live in a world with increased blurring between work and home, which we believe enables us to make our life better and find balance. Most of us have simply too much to do in too little time, and technology helps us to virtually be in two places at the same time. But could this increased flexibility to mix our jobs and our nonwork interests also have the potential to screw things up?

Granted, many of us don't mind multitasking—doing work, personal, and family tasks all at the same time. But, do you ever wonder whether it really is

good for our personal relationships to be taking cell phone calls during the weekends, vacations, and dinner? Are we really giving our best when we switch back and forth between our coworkers and instant messaging with family and friends? Is it good for our health and well-being to be checking work e-mail right up to bedtime while watching TV in our bedroom as we are getting ready to doze off to sleep?

To be effective “whole people”—people who really excel on the job and at home—it is vital to understand the new rules for work and life that make us increasingly the CEOs of our own lives. Sure, there’s a lot of noise out there in the media on the need for work-life balance and how to do it, but it’s not going to be useful to you unless you first understand how you are currently using flexibility in your life and whether how you are using it makes your life better or worse. The key that we found that we want to share with you—and that is the big idea of this book—is as CEO of your life, *you can take control of your life to make flexibility work for you instead of against you*. To do this, you must understand your *flexstyle*—how you manage the physical and psychological mixing of work and personal life. Then and only then can you learn how to make changes to ensure you use flexibility to help rather than hurt your life. Otherwise, too much flexibility leads to overlapping of work and personal life in ways that make us unhappy. And with the way society and technology have changed to enable more and more mixing between the two in our 24/7 wired world, unless we actively manage how we use flexibility, the flexibility that was supposed to help us can actually make our lives worse.

But as CEO of your life, you have the choice to avoid the flexibility trap. You can learn how to use flexibility to make your life better. You can begin by understanding your flexstyle, which is how you are currently managing relationships between work and personal life, your style for creating a workable life. You also should take stock of how well your flexstyle fits with the people you live and work with. You need to know what’s working and what’s not working so well and how to make changes—sometimes small and sometimes more drastic—to shift where you draw the line between work and non-work to be more effective on the job and at home.

This is the goal of this book: to help you better understand how you are currently managing relationships between work and personal life; identify gaps in how well it fits with your actual values, jobs, and family and personal life; and determine what actions you can take to make changes and negotiate a new deal that works better. This will enable you to close the gap between your values and

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dreams and how you are currently living your life to have more satisfying relationships with your family and friends, customers, bosses, coworkers, and even your own personal identity. This book will help you find a better way to manage your work and personal life, regardless of where you work and who you are, and offers you a new framework for making better choices.

By reading this book you will be able to

- Learn how to take charge of your life to implement new ways for using flexibility to make life work better.
- Better evaluate the different choices you make, either consciously or unconsciously, that shape how your work and personal life fit together.
- Develop more positive relationships between your work and personal life
- Get practical diagnostic tools and self-assessments to determine how you are currently using flexibility in your working life and how it may be getting in the way of the life that you really want.
- Identify the barriers that block you from making true personal changes.
- Get practical tips and tools for making changes.
- Identify which of the three flexstyle types you use to manage work and life relationships and determine whether you use flexibility to make your life better or worse. By finding your flexstyle, you will discover whether you're a Captive or a Work or Family Firster, a Fusion Lover or a Reactor, a Job Warrior or a Quality Timer.
- Learn tips and tools that you can use to improve the quality of your working life.
- Find strategies that work to negotiate a better deal (based on leading negotiation principles) that consider the interests of other parties, such as your bosses, coworkers, and family, who are invested in how you are currently managing work and personal life relationships to develop win-win solutions to work and life conflicts.
- Learn how to make it easier for you and the people you work and live with to have more effective working and personal lives.
- Get a refreshing new spin on the work-life dilemma.
- Make better choices and create a life that works on your terms.

Although work-life balance is an age-old problem, until now no book has offered as innovative or as useful solutions as this one does that anyone can use.

## *About the Research on Which This Book Was Based*

The ideas behind *CEO of Me* started with a study of literally hundreds of professionals and managers with varying levels of access to flexible work arrangements in four different types of organizations in North America. Several years ago, we started studying telecommuting, new ways of working, and the use of formal flexible work arrangements using scientific methods of control groups in naturally occurring organizational experiments.

We wanted to present examples of varieties of ways people work today. One set of surveys and interviews was collected from individuals who worked for a large manufacturing organization and who had limited access to flexible working arrangements. We wanted to include employees from a manufacturing environment, a context that typically has been excluded from most work-family flexibility studies. We were surprised to find that even individuals with limited access to flexibility found different ways of crafting workable lives. Another set of surveys and interviews was conducted with individuals who worked at either a major global financial services firm (pseudonym of Infocom) or a major computer company (pseudonym of Datacorp), and who sometimes worked at home or virtually either on nights or weekends by choice or a day or more a week. A third set of interviews was conducted with people at these firms who never or rarely worked at home or virtually.

The fourth set of interviews was conducted with high talent individuals (mostly women) who left mainstream corporate life when they had growing families. Some of these interviews were conducted with highly successful individuals who left a major revered Fortune 100 employer often on the 100 Best companies list to start their own, now thriving, consulting firm. Ironically, they now often serve as vendors to their former employer. Others we interviewed had less high powered jobs but still were successfully working for pay and managing caregiving. This fourth group is essentially part of what the popular media calls the “opting out” group—women who opt out of corporate America when they find the challenges of managing work and family too demanding in current corporate environments. It was our view that workplace studies tend to ignore the people who leave Corporate America. Yet to change Corporate America, we need to understand why some people left. Sometimes those who leave are studied on their own, such as in opting out research, but rarely are they included as part of a study that looks at use of workplace flexibility and managing career and personal life. Individuals who opt out are sometimes treated in the work-family

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literature as though they do not have careers or work-family conflict. We include them in the study as well because they are part of the story of the different ways people strive to create a better working life. An overview of our research methods and continuing research on how to create effective work-life relationships is found in the appendix.

We include numerous detailed cases throughout the book to illustrate different ways of working and of meshing work and personal life. As we do so, we use pseudonyms for both organizations and individuals. Details of the stories of the individuals we studied and include in the book are disguised—sometimes dramatically—to preserve confidentiality and to protect their privacy. We also drew on the culmination of our team’s combined more than 30 years of research on work and family and flexibility. In addition, our experiences as professional women struggling with that elusive (and often problematic) term *work-family balance* in our own lives, helped us to understand the daily struggles of our informants to cope with work, kids, health crises, and self- and elder-care, and informed the writing of this book.

We found that it didn’t matter so much whether a person was a formal telecommuter or a user of work-life policies. It also didn’t matter the type of family a person had or the gender, occupation, or type of company a person worked for. Rather what mattered most was how individuals self-managed relationships between work and home and how they *felt* about the way they were living their lives and managing their work-life relationships—what we label in this book as *flexstyles*. Two people can be doing exactly the same thing, such as telecommuting and leaving the baby with a sitter in the next room, and one person can feel great about it, and the other can feel unhappy and in pain.

So like us, you may have read some of the books out there already that propose their own solutions to the kind of work-life issues you are dealing with and come away unsatisfied. Mainstream and academic writers highlight a scant list of options: You must either revamp the entire organization in which you work to improve things (a daunting task for most), leave the organization, or do nothing and put up with the status quo. This book instead offers practical options of different ways to manage work and family relationships to create a better working life. We propose changes to the ways you are combining work and personal life demands so that you can tailor a unique situation to fit your needs. This personal journey of self-improvement is especially important until societal and employer support to help all employees manage the work-life interface becomes widespread and not the exception.

## CEO OF ME

This book will allow you to understand what you are currently doing as CEO of your life, to reflect on what's working well and not so well in light of what's most important to you and those you live and work with, and then to make practical changes to ensure your life is constructed around those priorities. You will come away with a life that works—on your terms!