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The manager-coach's roles and skills as needed to optimise the work-life balance of working women.

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Interview 1

Date: 2/9/11

Respondent: working women

Level: Senior management

Interviewer welcomes the respondent and explains the process.

The meaning of work-life balance

Question 1

Explain what you think the similarities and differences are between work-life balance and work-life integration? Do you think they are the same or are they different?

I would see them slightly differently: work-life integration talks to me about there being some sort of overlap between the two.

Okay.

Whereas work-life balance to me suggests that you almost wear two very different hats - one as a career woman and one as a mother, and you kind of set aside certain time to do each, but that when you are a mom you are solely a mom and when you are at work you are solely at work; where integration kind of suggests that you could wear those two hats at the same time. That is how I would perceive it.

Okay. So with work-life integration, you wear two hats at the same time and with work-life balance there are two different hats - so the career woman and the mom - and you take one hat off and you put the other one on.

Yes

So you don't wear them at the same time?

And obviously the fact that there is balance means that you are happy in separating your day accordingly, so that if you were to say that you had work-life balance, you would say that you have sufficient time in proportion to career, sufficient time in proportion to family or personal, but in this context I would say it is more around family, but that the two kind of …there's no meshing the two, there is no overlap.

Okay! Perfect and we can always come back to questions if there's something that else that arises.

<u>Question 2</u>

Alright, what does work-life balance mean to you?

Quite a complex question! (laughter) I think work-life balance means… if I had to say to you I had the ideal work-life balance, I think it could, for me, mean that I would still have a career and it would still be at a significant level, so I wouldn't just have a job. I would have a career, so I wouldn't merely just be earning an income but I would have a career, have some aspirations, and want growth within it. So that would become the career path but at the same time, being able to balance it with sufficient time and attention to my family, especially in times when they really need you; so when the kids are sick, that you have freedom to be with them. When there's something to celebrate with your children - that you know that you have the freedom to be there for those kinds of things. So I guess work-life balance for me means trying to find the ideal situation that gives me the best of both worlds.

Okay good, so it's being there for your kids, having the freedom to be there when you need to be there, particularly if they are sick or there's something important that's happening, but also then having a career that's not just a job, not just a salary, but with growth and aspirations at a certain level.

And also that sense of self-fulfillment that a job or a good career can give you: I have come to see that career as being the part that is me – outside of being just a mom. So if I looked at myself as an individual I would say 'well you know, I'm a wife, I'm a mother, I have a career with

a title of Manager or whatever'. It's just one of those other roles because for me personally I don't think I could be a full time mom.

Question 3

Okay! In what way, and possibly there's some overlap - in what way is work-life balance important to you and why?

I think being a working mom - one thing I have realized is that my scarcest resource is time. So work-life balance is about maximizing the 24 hours in every day. So it is about trying to get out the most for yourself and also for the people that depend on you. I often feel there are a lot of demands on me and it is about being realistic of what you can achieve in a day but also just try and maximize the day for everyone – for yourself, your employer or the people that are depending on you in your work situation, your family who are dependent on you; I'm just trying to get smart on how you use each day, how you spend that time. It's important because you want to be there for the big stuff. I don't want to sit back in ten years' time and say 'oh gosh I've missed so much of my children's lives' and then by the same token I don't want to sit there in ten years' time and say my kids have moved on and I have nothing for myself anymore; you know, my whole life revolved around them and now all of a sudden they are becoming parents and you know I am not sure where I fit into my own little life.

Ok thank you.

Question 4

Please describe your current levels of work-life balance.

At the moment, I think that I have a manager who is pretty understanding: so if the kids are sick or something like that, I do have quite a bit of freedom there but by the same token, I know that if I am not in the office there are certain things that fall by the wayside. So I think I feel the pressure of the job, not so much the pressure of the people.

Ok

What I do have is a good support system in the background, which works quite well.

So you say it's not the people, it's more the job because things build up? Ok, and a good support system - is that what you said?

Yes a good support structure.

Good support structure for the kids.

And I would like more freedom ideally, but still being relatively new in this position I think that it's difficult to expect it now.

You mentioned freedom, and you say you have a fair amount of freedom now, and you have got the support structure.

When you said work-life balance is important and why, you said it is important to be able to optimise your time, and in terms of work-life balance, have a career as well as being a mom. In terms of your current levels of work-life balance, are those requirements being fulfilled? So the job allows some freedom but not full, because the job happens anyway whether you there or not, and it's a new role.

I am quite fortunate in that although I don't have a whole lot of flexibility maybe around my job right now, because I've got a good structure in the background, the time that I do spend with my children is real quality time. So for example, when I pick my kids up in the afternoon they have been with my mom during the day so they are bathed already, so when you get home it's a case of feeding them; we don't have a whole lot of tasks to do, the evening is not too jam-packed with a whole lot of tasks before we get to actually relax and chat and just be together. We have the freedom to sit on the floor and build a puzzle rather than to bath the kids.

So you can relax, chat and be together from the minute you get home rather than get through those jobs first.

<u>Question 5</u>

Do you experience any challenges in achieving work-life balance?

I think the biggest challenge is just that every minute of every day does count and you sometimes get a little bit harassed. Someone else said to me the other day, 'I feel all I am saying to my child is "shut up and hurry up"'. It feels like every moment of every day is a constant timeline - there is no freedom to slip up for ten minutes, any which way, because somebody is depending on you. So I think that ultimately is stressful.

That's was my next question - 'how stressful is that'?

<u>Question 6</u>

This might be overlap but what challenges do you experience? Give me some examples?

For example, say the kids are sick, I feel I have the freedom to take them to the doctor or whatever - but then my daughter had pneumonia and had to go for physio, but that meant her going every single day for approximately an hour. So it is a challenge for me to make sure that I either get somebody else to take her, but which ideally I would like to do, just to be there for her but ….so the challenges are to get the right appointment – either the first appointment in the morning or the last appointment in the day and then, if it's the last appointment in the day, to make sure that I leave the office - not too early but just in time - to get to pick her up to take her to the physio and then get back to pick my son up, so we can get home and is not too late for dinner. So the whole structure and everything works great on a normal day; if there's disruption or there's a change in plan… it is very often just a logistical challenge.

It chucks out all the planning.

It is logistics! (laughter)

It is, you can't physically be at more than one place at a time but mentally you would like to be.

You can't create more hours in a day.

Question 7

To what extent do you think work-life balance is achievable for you, so looking at the future?

Well, I think it's about putting a whole lot of things into place, and by that I mean support structures and where the kids are at school in future, whether it be actual school or play school or whatever; it's about having the plan B. But, I would really like to think that in future, with technology changing and stuff, there would be more freedom to work from home. Especially in my situation, I do a lot of travelling to get the kids to where they need to be so if I could cut that portion out, it would free up a lot of time in my day. I would love to think that, in the future, we would have to maybe travel less and have more time in the day, from that perspective. I think that work-life balance is something that my own manager is very understanding of, he has a very good appreciation for it. So if I could come up with workable suggestions or solutions I think he would be completely open to those, but I've also learnt along the way that I have to be aware that I can be my own worst enemy in this regard as well.

Tell me a bit about that.

I think - I'm not sure quite what it stems from - but I think it is this real sense of responsibility that I have, you know, to my work and to my career, so I find I always self-sabotage because I find it difficult to maybe say no or I feel guilty if I don't feel like I am completely stretched at work, fully engaged, not putting in hours. Sometimes I think the pressures at work are pressures that I put on myself, rather than always expectations from other people.

OK. So those pressures that you put possibly on yourself aren't pressures from other people - how would you anticipate that that could impact on your ability to achieve work-life balance in the future?

I think the more you do in your job, the more people start to expect from you and so, from the outset you are putting a huge amount of pressure on yourself; to get the stuff done. You almost have this cycle where people start expecting more, you start producing more and then it becomes difficult to kind of draw the line in the sand and say 'well yes, I have something on my desk but because of work-life balance, or because my family needs me or because whatever

reason, it's going to wait for tomorrow'. It's almost having enough self-discipline or cutting yourself enough slack to call it quits, pick up your bag and leave, and leave it behind. It is not only to leave the work behind but the pressure and the stress, and not have this guilt or this nagging feeling, and being like emotionally absent at home because you are thinking of work. It is also quite difficult to cut off from thinking about the ten things that you need to do tomorrow while you are with your family.

You possibly find that quite a lot of that will be covered when we talk about your working reality.

<u>Question 8</u>

Ok, what changes would you notice, if and when you achieve the work-life balance that may come eventually - how would it feel and what would it look like?

I think, in my ideal world, I would still work some core hours, either a set amount of hours per day in an office or a set amount of hours per week in the office, or something like that, because I still would like to be visible in the office, have that interaction, get that dynamic - all of that. So I would like certain core hours and I would very much like them to be negotiated and agreed with my manager and then basically to work certain hours from home or in my own time. And I think that my perception is that most jobs have this element of stuff that you need to be in the office for and stuff that you can work on in your own time and space, and depending on what position I would be in at the time, it would dictate what those core hours would be and how much flexibility there would be of working from home. But I would say that the ideal work-life balance would be about measuring the outputs and the value the person adds rather than being conscious of hours that are put into being at work.

You said measure outputs and value add rather than hours put into being at work.

That brings us to the end of the work-life balance questions, so let's look at the working woman's reality in attempting to achieve work-life balance.

The working woman's reality in attempting to achieve work-life balance

Question 9

What are your realities as a working woman?

Too few hours in the day… In our environment, it comes down to there being a willingness to understand what it means to be a working mother, so they are conscious of it and want to assist, but they don't really know how. I think the reality of being a working woman is that it comes with a lot of guilt – you feel like you are never sure you are spending enough time with the kids or adding enough value at work. Things like some of the social events that the company does - you kind of feel guilty that you don't stay and relax and have a blast with everybody, but the time you are there having a wonderful time then you are feeling guilty about the fact that you are robbing your family of time.

So if you don't stay you feel guilty and if you do stay you feel guilty.

Absolutely! Some of the realities are that, on the upside, this company doesn't have this kind of clock card mentality. I think there definitely is this movement towards... it has kind of always been there, but the company does have the mentality of measuring people on the value they add rather than clocking hours. The reality is that there is a job and it needs to get done; and there is a consciousness from my own side saying if they had a guy doing this, would they have to deal with all this other drama that I bring? You know? Nobody has ever suggested it or it has not come up, it is just a consciousness I have managed with other people - you don't want to be the hardworking, troublesome employee that has a whole lot of issues.

And is that how you feel - the hard working, troublesome employee with a whole lot of issues?

No, it's not a day-to-day thing but I think where there is a hiccup in the system and you have additional demands from your family – again e.g. when the kids are sick, that is one that happens so easily and it is beyond your control but it just puts so much more pressure on you and you are running off in different directions, to the doctor, physio or whatever it may be and

you just… like I say it is probably me being more self-conscious about it rather than anyone else being aware of it – that you go running off and need to snatch a few hours here and there out of the day – you just sometimes wonder about a male doing this! (laughter)

Question 10

How do these realities impact on your ability to achieve work-life balance?

At the moment I have a kind of a formula. Is it absolutely ideal? Maybe not, I would possibly want some changes, but it does work - for the most part, it works, but on a typical day! (laughter)

There is always a 'but'.

Like I say, on a typical day it is fine but there can be just some kind of a minor change that can throw a bit of a spanner in the works. I have spoken about the obvious one, like when the kids are sick, but even something like a strategy session - that throws a spanner in the works for a number of reasons because now, the venue has changed, so you are travelling somewhere else and that talks to my logistical mind - and it often means staying away. It can be as simple as something like a late afternoon meeting that runs over time. You are scheduled for a specific time and everybody else is able to stay later, and you don't want to miss out, so you stick around for the rest of the meeting but it just throws the nice rhythm you have going for the day, out.

It's not a question here but I just want to ask you - To what degree do those realities impact on your career - or don't they?

I don't have any real examples. I have never been in a situation where I've been explicitly been told or it's been discussed, but I think I am also very mindful of managing it, so I pick my battles; so I will try and compromise on some and others I will just say 'I can't do that meeting, it is too late'; whereas with a strat session I will say 'I will move heaven and earth to be there at 8 o' clock, although it is a different venue and it's more difficult for me to get there' or whatever. So I think I'm very mindful in trying to manage those and pick my battles but I think there is an

element of 'missing out' sometimes, people might… maybe someone doesn't invite you to the meeting, it would be nice to have you there, but they know it is a late afternoon meeting and they know it might be a problem for you.

So, in that instance, would they just not invite you?

I think, potentially, you always run that risk - that people might opt not to invite you and so you might have a gap in your knowledge. I can't give you specific examples where I can say 'yes, this was to my detriment' but there is consciousness of it and the fact that if there was a young man doing this job, would he have to be mindful of certain things, you know?

Question 11

How do you achieve a sense of meaning?

Very broad question! (laughter) For me, it's about me being many things; it's about being a career woman, it's about being a mother, it's about being a wife, it's about being a daughter, being a sister - all these different roles which we play in life, and there's a certain fulfillment that you get out each of those relationships, whether it's a loving relationship with a child or mother or a business-like relationship with a client or something; there is a sense of self-fulfillment in that as well. I guess that's what it's about, it's about interacting with different people and how other people impact in your life and vice versa.

Question 12

Ok! Now what brings you fulfillment?

A sense of achievement - that can be also again from many things - the children doing well, somebody giving you a compliment about your children, to a successful meeting at work, to taking your family on holiday. It's about always setting goals or having a perception of what your ideal life would be, and just knowing that you are getting closer to it. For me that is like a sense of fulfillment. It's not necessarily about material things but more about the people in your life and the interaction with them. But by the same token, material things are sometimes like a benchmark of your success, I would say. Something like getting a nice new car is not about

having the car per sè, it is about saying 'my hard work has paid off and so we have achieved something in that we are fortunate enough to be able to buy this car, and have comfort and happy travelling for the family or something'.

Question 13

Ok. What support could be provided to you to optimise your levels of work-life balance?

I think that there should be a bigger drive from a technology perspective so the people can work from home. In our organisation, I honestly believe that there's this willingness to do it but I just don't think they always know how and I suspect that is because there are not that many women driving this at a senior level and men just don't know or have the empathy … they have sympathy, but not empathy. They don't have a full understanding, they don't know what the challenges are, as they have never experienced them.

Question 14

Ok, what should the organisation's roles be in optimising work-life balance - if any?

Well, I think that one of the fundamental things is that an organisation has to ask itself whether these women are critical and add value. So, I am probably not speaking in a politically correct way, but if it is easier to have a bunch of young men doing the job, well then, rather do that. But if you say that 'we need women in certain roles because they add something more or different than a male could or whatever', then I think the organisation has to acknowledge that they come with a slightly different set of needs; and I think it is about getting to understand what those needs are; and I think the critical part is that those needs are, I am sure, different for every single woman. And I guess the ideal situation then is that the organisation and that particular woman come up with a unique set of rules or a unique set of measurements for each person. That would be the ideal scenario for any person, not just the working mom - that each person has got some challenges; but I really think that having children is something that makes or breaks careers. I have read some articles where they say that a lot of women actually go back to work, especially quite senior women, go back to work when their kids are little and still manage

to try and find work-life balance and they seem to manage for a couple of years, but ultimately they just can't keep it up.

There is a really good book called On Ramps and Off Ramps by Sylvia Hewlett, and it is exactly that, kind of taking offramps and then coming back on. I mentioned it in a strategy meeting recently - the Scenic Route – and they thought it was hysterical!

I think that the problem is when you do take that offramp and exit the working world and come back in, I think it is disruptive; if you look at a career over its life span, it is disruptive for the company and the woman and for a woman, her self-confidence takes a knock. In this day and age, you become aware how technology has changed and maybe you haven't quite kept up with it, you know, and if you go back, what level do you go in at? Is it slightly more junior, and you don't know what to expect when you get there? From an organisation's point of view, you had somebody, especially if that person was senior, and now you have lost them; it would have been more ideal to keep them in the organisation but maybe just not mainstream, so that they still stay up to date; or do you let them go off and take the scenic route and come back? It just seems like it could be really disruptive – to both parties.

The roles and skills of the manager-coach

Question 15

Ok! The roles and skills of a manager-coach - this is based on coffee conversations.

Not thinking of the theory behind it, but explain the role of a manager-coach in our organisation. What do you think a role of a manager-coach is?

I think there are quite a few aspects to it. I think it's about… I think the role of a manager-coach is about assessing your performance and optimising your performance, trying and getting the best out of you. I think the role is also about giving you a sense of what the company or division's objectives are, to give you a very good sense of the playing fields, the industry that you are in, the organisation that you are in, how we do things around here. I think the role of a manager-coach is also about managing poor performance; making sure that your efforts are in

line with company objectives. It's also about the transfer of their skills or their expertise, their experience. I think that is pretty much it.

Question 16

What do you think the manager-coach does that helps working woman - if anything?

I think the manager-coach is that person who is going to help you. I mean, especially in our organisation, you basically establish the rules around your working environment with your manager-coach, so that is the person who is either going to give you that freedom and flexibility or not. In the organisation, there isn't one rule around the way people work or have to work; there is room for flexibility and then it is up to you to establish that with your manager-coach.

What do you think the manager-coach does that helps working women?

The manager is that one that can give you that flexibility, but the manager is also the one that is going to have an awareness of the value that you add, and hopefully the ideal manager is not going to measure it against the number of hours he sees you in the office. And, I guess, it is also just an attitude; if, as a working mom, you have to take time off because the kids are ill, that is a reality, but it is how it is received by your manager – they could be really understanding of it or it can be 'I have to accept it but I am not happy about it'.

So it's how they respond to such situations?

Ja, more around their attitude, which is either going to place more stress on me or kind of make me feel more comfortable with the situation.

Question 17

Ok what could your manager-coach do to assist working women? And that could actually read 'you' so, what could your manager-coach do to assist you?

I think, to be very honest, right now I couldn't really demand anything more from my management. I think again, the challenge is more of the job - it is just the reality. I mean, I can say something like, I would want to work one day a week from home but in the position I am in

at the moment, it is not really feasible. I couldn't look to my manager to give me that when I know it is not practical right now and I could do myself an injustice. So I could only really ask my manager to maybe work towards a future goal, but like I said, I am relatively new in my position and time is the office is critical.

Question 18

This might be overlap but what role does your manager-coach play in optimising work-life balance?

I think there's a bit of overlap between the questions because again I think it is … well certainly my manager is the one I would look to, to negotiate more flexible work hours, or have different work structure or demands. And with my manager and I, it has been very much around… we have been quite fortunate in that respect in that we have defined the role and so I have negotiated some expectations around that; and we have got to a point where we both feel that the PDP's are almost a written contract between us - about what I think he can expect from me, and what he should be able to expect from me. So, I saw the structuring of the PDP's as very much like a contract between us. And so again, he would be the one I would look to, but I think ultimately the responsibility lies with me to tell him what I need, and then it is almost up to him to tell me what the organisation needs, and for us to find the middle ground.

Question 19

Ok, it looks like you have answered this but if there is anything you would like to add - what role could your manager-coach play in optimising work-life balance?

I think that's very much around just that willingness to think out of the box and find a tailor made solution.

Question 20

What effect do you think your manager-coach conversations have on your work-life balance?

Ok, I'm a big fan of the coffee conversations, I always have been. I just think because they are structured, they are relaxed - they allow people to get to know people as individuals and the

structure allows for you to be seen as a whole person rather than just an employee. Especially with my manager, a typical coffee conversation is 'how are the kids', and then it allows for you to say 'the kids are fine but next week is going to be really hectic because my daughter is in a school play and I would really like to go and see that'. So it allows conversation to develop and it allows for you to bring in the flow of conversation, it is broad and open and from a work balance perspective it allows you to discuss issues, and to try and find solutions or to negotiate different sets of circumstances; and if they are quite regular, you can chat about 'next week I have this coming up'. You can do it on a case by case basis, instead of having this all-encompassing ruling about what you can and can't do.

Question 21

Ok! What effect do you think your manager-coaching conversations could have on your work-life balance?

I think it is about - if I was facing a particular challenge or whatever, it definitely gives scope for those kinds of discussions.

Question 22

Thinking organisationally, what role do you think manager-coaching conversations could play in the organisation, in the future?

Talking specifically around work-life balance?

Ja, work-life balance and the realities of the working woman

Again, I think that maybe people need to just have an awareness that there is this forum in which to discuss these kind of things. And then its…I guess that people have a willingness to try and find a solution for both the individual and the organisation – try and find a recipe that works in order to live, and I think the coffee conversations is the place for this; and you can start these discussions because coffee conversations are so informal, you start to learn about the person and then lead on to… again it doesn't have to be for working moms, it could be challenges like 'I am studying an MBA' or whatever.

So it's kind of whatever challenges or experience that's the…

For me, I just kind of think of myself in a manager role, to say 'ok somebody is studying an MBA. What does that mean, what are the demands of you? I mean gosh, you've got lectures until 9 o'clock at night, is it realistic for me to expect you to be in the office at your normal 7 o'clock in the morning the days after that, because you are going to get to bed late and you must be exhausted'. So I can demand or expect you to be here at 7 o'clock in the morning like you usually are, but are you going to give the best of yourself at that time in any case? So maybe say, not to expect you for a period or during these weeks while you have intensive lectures, your hours are slightly changed, those kinds of things. The coffee conversations allow for it, because it is not such a structured discussion, and if coffee conversations are done in a correct way, they automatically encompass something around the person's life outside of the organisation, which ultimately impacts.

Question 23

Ok, describe if there's any connection between manager-coaching conversations and the retention of women in the work place.

Absolutely, without a doubt! I think of my own career, the number one reason I left any job was because of one of two reasons – either because of my own line manager or because of growth prospects; I either didn't perceive that I had growth prospects where I was or I could see better growth prospects somewhere else. And I think those conversations are indicative of the relationship you have with your line manager; and then in those conversations your line manager should give you a very clear feeling of what their perception is of your growth opportunities and you should also be able to say 'well, I am right now a working mom and I don't want to grow, I want to stay as is for the next year'. So, if you have a good underlying relationship with your manager and can have open and honest conversations, you both have a very good understanding of what you can expect from each other; and I think if the expectations are aligned that is almost half the battle won, because you know really clearly what is expected of you and they can very clearly put out there what is required from the organisation.

Put out there what the expectations are.

Yes, and the thing is, at the end of the day if you can't align the expectations but you can't establish that upfront, you have issues about poor performance or frustration; and then I'm thinking, if you try and align the expectations up front, then you can say 'this is really not a role for you to fill now'. And before there is frustration or poor performance, maybe come up with some other solution or one for the organization; and maybe it is a parting of ways at the end of the day; but I think it is less likely if you establish these things up front or on an ongoing basis - rather than it becoming an issue and then trying to resolve it - because once they become an issue, the person is more likely to look elsewhere and see what other opportunities there are.

So are you saying that you would use these conversations as a forum for aligning expectations?

Absolutely

Question 24

What skills does your manager-coach display?

He is a very good listener, and he has empathy for the situations, he has a real interest in the people in his team, as individuals, not just for role of that you fulfill. He is a good communicator and he is a clear thinker.

Question 25

These might be the same or they might be different - what skills would you expect your manager-coach to display?

Ja, it would be all of the above that he does display; I think what I would possibly add on is to be little bit more firm about the organisation's expectations - so he's almost a little bit too understanding. But just to find that balance between the organisation and the individual, just to be maybe a little bit more clear about expectations from the organisation.

Anything else you would add?

No, I mean as a manager-coach, I think he fills that role really well. He has a real commitment to coffee conversations and just knowing the people in the team. I think one of the things that make him so successful as well is that he is very much a part of the team, rather than just a manager, so he also shares a lot about himself from a personal perspective.

Question 26

OK! What could he do more of or less of to support you more?

I think that the one thing he could possibly do slightly more of is to get a slightly better understanding of what it is I do day-to-day; so more of a sense of what my day is filled with; just trying to be a little bit closer to the detail of my job.

How would that help in supporting you?

I think he would just have a better understanding of the demands of the job and I think he would just get a better appreciation of where the time is spent; why the day seems so short. I mean to say, for example, that I completed the underwriting result today - might sound like no big deal, but if you understood what it entailed to complete the underwriting result, he would possibly have an appreciation that that took up most of the day. You know, it just to get close to some of the details and have a better appreciation. In going through the PDP's, we have been through quite a bit of that, so it was interesting for me to see that he had a stab at that, he has a better understanding now to say 'ok well, you are right, those are a lot of your functions' but I also do all these other things that land on my desk that are very time consuming that nobody else can do at this stage. So he is getting closer, but I think it is just that one thing that I would say would provide better support - for him to have a little bit more understanding of the detail of my job, and the other people in my team, for that matter.

So, that is the last one, thank you so much!

Can I just add something?

Yes

While we are having this discussion, it just feels like I know specifically that your kind of topic is related to the manager-coach, but I kind of have this feeling that the manager-coach, although they have a huge impact, is not the only impact that you have. There are other challenges in finding work-life balance that are beyond your manager. I will give you some of the examples: Company culture has a big impact, and I am not sure if it's then up to your manager-coach to buffer between you and the company or organisation, or if it is up to you to manage that?

When you say buffer - explain it, give me an example?

So, let's say it's an expectation that each division of our organisation goes on a strategy session and generally these things are done, the company culture, is to do them over two days away from home. Is it up to you or me as an individual to say 'well sorry, I can't do that I'm very sorry, I'm committed to 8-5 work. I have to be in the office now and those are my working hours and although the expectation is for me attend a meeting overnight somewhere and for logistical or for whatever reason, I just can't do that', or is it up to my manager to say 'well, in my team I have Michelle who is a working mom and I just know it is logistically difficult for her'. Should he address that upfront or is it up to the individual?

What do you think?

I don't really know what the answer is. I think the answer is somewhere in between in that I can't honestly expect Rob or any other manager, for that matter, to anticipate my problems. So, the responsibility lies with me to say 'guys, this is difficult for me' but I also think that if the manager knows that it is difficult for you - that if you are contracting basically with your manager and you are creating your expectations with him - that he should manage some of those things within the organisation as well. You interact with so many people within the organisation - so you have a direct line manager who you interact with who maybe knows 'don't make a meeting that runs after 4.30' - but if one of the others, for example a strat co member, was to invite you to a meeting that is at 4.30 in the afternoon, and that's outside of work or the hours of agreement you have with your line manager, it is very difficult to say 'I leave at four', because it is a senior member in the organisation.

Ja I see exactly what you saying.

So, if you are interacting with your manager, it's easy - I might not even have to say that 'well I have a problem with the kids'. He will say 'Would you be ok, would you manage that?' But, some of the work-life balance demands or some of the other places where it starts getting sticky actually fall outside that relationship - that's some of the difficulties that I find at the moment.

For other people, they are involved with clients or something, and their expectation from their clients may be beyond the understanding that they have with the line manager.

So, you can achieve work-life balance in your relationship with your manager, based on understanding of the conversations and whatever you have, but it extends beyond that.

Yes.

Okay. Because of client pressures or organisational pressures and expectations and so on

And I mean I do think that it's maybe a case of sort of baby steps towards an ultimate goal because if there is a full mind set of work-life balance then there is an understanding that each individual has reached an agreement with their manager and they have full right to say 'those are my parameters'.

Again, I don't know if it is a personal thing but I have this awareness that I don't want everybody to treat me with kid gloves because I have kids or I'm a working mom or whatever or I have special treatment; I don't want to be treated differently, but the work-life balance challenge extends beyond, for me, just the relationship with your manager. Like I said, there are certain things like some social events, how you are perceived by your colleagues and your peers because you are not at the social event. My manager, for example, doesn't have an issue with it at all, he fully understands that this stuff happens on a Friday afternoon or whatever and you know for some people it would extend right through to Friday evening, maybe Saturday morning; and if I had to leave, he would not have an issue with it at all, but how do some of your peers and colleagues perceive this? I guess it is about confidence just to say 'well I actually don't care' but, I think anybody with half a brain realizes that those things do have an effect on them.

Maybe then the question is, is striving for work-life balance realistic?

I haven't met many, especially moms, who would say to me that they have achieved it; I have met a lot of people who are striving towards it, that admit to getting some parts of it right, but I can't say, I honestly can't say I have met any woman that says to me 'I have the ideal, I am completely satisfied with the situation at work and with the situation at home'. But then maybe you could say that of most things in life, nobody is 100% satisfied, but I think more so on this topic than most others, women tell me that it always seems to be a work in progress. I mean to say is it realistic? Well, if you didn't strive for something I think it would just go completely out of kilter, so I think you need to try and achieve it and I think you need to be realistic about your expectations; and that is why I say, from an organisational perspective, the organisation also needs to be realistic. That is why I say maybe the employers might say 'why do we have (woman's name) in that position when we could have (man's name) or (man's name)?'

Well, you know if it was my business I would like to say that I think that as individuals, women can bring in a certain set of skills but as a group as well, I think women bring in a different element into business than men do. I have seen women in the workplace that are just like men, who are more out there, more aggressive, and to me that is the same as having a man in that position. But when you put a woman in that position, she does bring a different perspective and a different set of skills. It is almost like parents, you have a mommy and daddy and the daddies bring certain things to children and the mommies bring a different thing. And you find some common traits, but daddies are often the ones that wrestle when the mommies are soft caregivers, and I think in an organisation it is the same. So, I think you would want women in the organisation, but having a woman in the organisation means that potentially she is either going to be young and have no children but be possibly inexperienced, and then as she gets more experienced, it is probably going to coincide with a time in her life where she starts to have children and then has these other demands.

That's perfect. Thanks so much for your time and contribution!

The interviewer thanks the respondent and closes the interview.