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A WELL-BEING MOMENT

Dave Varwig
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The Amount of Free Time Required to Improve Work/Life Balance is Less Than We Think

You don't have to quit work and go live in the mountains to rebalance your life - there are small changes you can make to hit the work/life 'sweet spot'.

In her podcast [The Happiness Lab](#) Dr. Laurie Santos asks listeners for questions - and a subject that came up time and again was **work/life balance**: *“Are we born to work or are we born to live?”* That question is the result of our thinking about: *‘What am I doing here? Why am I still doing this? Do I really enjoy what I'm doing?’*

In this period of the **Great Resignation**, many have quit their jobs and often resettle to focus on doing what they enjoy in their leisure time, be it mountain biking, hiking, or simply walking the dog. One wonders if the changes these “drop-outs” have made are sustainable since some of us may see that at the radical end of the spectrum – because most people can't leave their jobs or homes, no matter how much that idea might appeal to them. Our finances might not allow us to quit a job; or we may need to stay in a certain location while our kids finish school, or to care for an elderly relative. But, that doesn't mean we can't make smaller meaningful changes to improve our work/life balance. Science suggests the amount of time we need to free up to feel happier is less than we might think, according to Cassie Holmes of UCLA Anderson School of Management, and the author of [Happier Hour](#). Cassie and her associates [looked at data from the American Time Use Survey](#) – which quizzes 35,000 people about how they spend their time and how they feel about those decisions. Cassie and her colleagues found that **having little or no free time is awful** – it's overwhelming and stressful and brings all those yucky symptoms stress triggers in our bodies. But, per the research, **we don't need to quit our jobs and devote ourselves to a life of leisure**. “I didn't know that there would be a sweet spot. I thought it would just be that more free time is better,” says Cassie. “But what we've found in the data is that in fact there is a sweet spot.” And **that sweet spot seems to be between 2 - 5 hours a day** – less than that causes unhappiness, but with more than 5 hours of free time “you actually see a decrease in life satisfaction... because people feel they're lacking a sense of purpose.” For many of us, freeing up 5 hours to do something we love seems implausible. “I will say that sounds totally unattainable,” agrees Cassie. “However, it's likely that 2 hours is not completely out of reach.”

Balancing work and leisure is something you have to attend to constantly. It's not just about relaxing on the weekend or on vacation.

“We have to try to carve out and protect 120 minutes of time for ourselves each and every day.”

That could start by making sure we take breaks and a lunch hour at work – or it could mean reading a novel instead of catching up on work emails in our down time.

Source acknowledgement: Dr. Laurie Santos [The Science of Wellbeing](#), a weekly newsletter that looks at the latest research on **happiness**.

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