

Working Families

Video transcript

Christine Armstrong: Hello my name is Christine Armstrong and until nine years ago when I had my first baby, I had no idea how the way we work can be so destructive to our families. It inspired me to write the book [The mother of All Jobs: How to Have Children and a Career and Stay Sane\(ish\)](#). It's also why I am running this focus group for AXA IM today exploring different types of working families and discussing a work life balance.

Lara Webb: I am a single mother of a three and a half year old daughter. I also have an eighty year old mother. So I've always worked in the city, it's always been a culture of being 'on' 24/7. I mean, I don't at the moment, do a job which, you know, absolutely demands that. I know there are lot of people far busier and far more pressurised than I am. It is something that I find quite difficult to re-adjust to, and I know I ought to, and I know people around me would be supportive of doing that- but then there is me, as well. And that's a whole different meaning.

Cameron Gray: What you will find though, is that if you block out your diary, meetings migrate to free time on the calendar and no-one even knows, they just think you're busy.

Frederico Faravelli: I discovered that if you have a good measurement of your agenda, you are able to plan, and you pass the message that you can plan your job, you can organise it, you can get more from people. The point is that when you don't give enough value to the time, you tend to consider the time as a commodity. Time is not a commodity, it is something that is to finish. If you spend it in the wrong way, you tend to spend too much time on something that is possibly, not so relevant. So when you start to manage and you take the control of your agenda you tend to find that you can do the same thing in a better way, simply starting earlier to plan what you have to do.

Mary Zerner: John Stainsby said to me the other day *"I know you are always the last one out of here, you always like to say goodbye to Andrea and that kind*

of thing, but you are the one in charge of your diary. I have my days when I go home at five o'clock, you know, I know that's what I'm going to do. It is set in stone unless there is something important." He just said to me "You are you in charge of your calendar." You know, it is the first time I've worked in an organisation in the city that basically says: 'You're in charge of it/'. You do what you have to do obviously.

Justine Shadrake: I think it works better if it is more flexible thing. So if you can try to train yourself to leave at a decent time, but then when it's needed, and there are times when it's needed, there are times when you do really need to take that call at 7 o'clock, or you do need to work on that Saturday morning just to finish something. If you are willing to be that flexible, then the company should be flexible back with you. It shouldn't work against you or stop you progressing in a company. In fact they should see that you are more agile.

Christine Armstrong: How does it work when you are going off to do something completely different and you're going to be out of contact doing something where no-body can call you?

Alec Harper: I cannot think of anyone that we have rubbed up against where having flexible work-life balance is an issue. Work is important, but the self is more important. My middle child Sam, he's 11 now, we knew that when he was born things weren't quite right and from the age of around four to six months he started seizures. Over time it developed, and it was diagnosed that he had a very rare genetic malfunction that meant his brain hadn't developed properly. So, he's effectively blind, he can't feed, can't walk, can't talk, can't sit, can't stand, can't do anything for himself. Quite regularly, I was getting phone calls saying: "*We are in an ambulance you need to come home.*" So I would have to get home, support my other child, get her from school, get out to the hospital, manage that work life balance of looking after one child that was home and the other in the hospital. And throughout all of that time there was never any pressure at all from work to return to the office, make, that particular meeting. It was all about do what's right for your family. That is something I have really carried through with me and it's how I view the company and how I treat the people that report to me.

Steve Clark: From even before I joined the AXA IM, which was over six years ago now, I was really clear, even when I spoke to the recruiter who had first approached me about the job, that I have my kids on a Tuesday night for example, and so I need to leave at four 'o clock on a Tuesday. It was only till I got here that I kind of realised that that was okay because, there was nothing

contractual or anything like that. So, there is still that niggle of doubt. It's strange even now I've been doing it six years I leave early on a Tuesday and I still feel a bit guilty walking out of the office. I don't know why. I'm waiting for someone to turn around and go: "*Oh, hold on a moment you can't do that.*" I guess that's just my head.

Lara Webb: Sometimes I look at people who are leaving at five on the dot if I'm staying and I feel guilty because I am like, oh, I should be going home to my daughter. And then if I leave at five o'clock and everybody else is staying I think, oh, I feel guilty I should still be at work.

Christine Armstrong: Is there a core view do you think in wider business where people say well it's all very good to talk about these things but actually the job takes this long and it takes a lot of hours and these are the kind of jobs people have?

Mary Zerner: I don't think this is necessarily the case, certainly not at AXA IM. What I think is going to be the challenge for us is the nature of teams and our roles in them. Leading teams or bringing teams together in that more agile working, design thinking kind of way. If we haven't really arrived at that together and developed that together it's not something you can just push, you know, top-down.

Alec Harper: It comes to half past three, four o'clock if I don't whatever it is today-in our business, no-one dies! It can be left until tomorrow. I think age gives you that perspective and the ability to relax a little bit. I think maybe collectively the industry finance world is taking itself far too seriously- maybe that will change?

Mary Zerner: It's up to you if you want to really want to make a change. It's not really about the company or the manager, or the, I think it really has got to be led by you.