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### Where work and death meet

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# WHERE WORK AND DEATH MEET

DR MANOJ THULASIDAS

STRESS is as much a part of our corporate careers as death is a fact of life. Still, it is best to keep the two (career and death) separate. This message is lost on some hardworking souls here who literally work themselves to death.

The reason for death in sedentary jobs is an insidious condition called deep vein thrombosis. It develops when, after extended hours spent sitting, a blood clot forms in the lower limbs. The clot then travels to vital organs in the upper body, where it wreaks havoc, including death.

The trick to avoiding such an untimely demise, of course, is to make sure one doesn't sit for long. But this is easier said than done, especially when the pressure mounts and deadlines loom.

Here is where you have to get your priorities straight. What do you value more? The quality of life or corporate success? The implication here is that you cannot have both, as illustrated in a well-known quip in investment banking circles that goes like this: "If you can't come in on Saturday, don't bother coming in on Sunday!"

You can, however, make a compromise. It is possible to "let go" a little of career aspirations and improve your quality of life tremendously. This balancing act is not simple though; nothing in life is.

QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY  
LONG HOURS MAKE THE  
POSSIBILITY OF QUALITY  
WORK REMOTE.



There are a few factors that undermine work-life balance.

One is the materialistic culture we live in. This trend is hard to fight.

Second is a misguided notion that you can first "make it", then sit back and enjoy life. The fact is: The time when you are free from worldly worries rarely materialises.

Third, you may have a career-oriented partner. Even if you are ready to take a balanced approach, your partner

may not be, thereby diminishing the value of putting it in practice.

These are factors you have to battle constantly. But you can win the battle by arming yourself with logic, discipline and determination.

However, there is a fourth, much more sinister, factor – the myth that a successful career is an all-or-nothing proposition, as implied in the investment banking joke. It is a myth (perhaps knowingly propagated by bosses)

that hangs over our corporate heads like the sword of Damocles.

Because of this myth, people end up working late, trying to make a favourable impression. But a good impression is formed not through the quantity of work but through its quality. Turn in quality work that makes an impact and you will be rewarded, regardless of how long it took you to accomplish it.

Long hours, in my view, make the possibility of quality work remote.

Such melancholic long hours are best left to workaholics; they keep working because they cannot help it. It is not so much a career aspiration but a force of habit coupled with a fear of social life.

To strike a work-life balance in today's dog-eat-dog world, you may have to sacrifice a few upper rungs of the proverbial corporate ladder.

Raging against the corporate machine with no regard to the consequences ultimately boils down to one simple realisation – that making a living amounts to nothing if your life is lost in the process.

*The writer, a scientist from the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (Cern), currently heads OCBC's quantitative analytics team. His internationally-acclaimed book, *The Unreal Universe*, is available in local bookstores and at [www.TheUnrealUniverse.com](http://www.TheUnrealUniverse.com)*