

ThirdPath's reader's guide:

Overwhelmed, Work, Love and Play When No One Has the Time **By Brigid Schulte**

LIVING THE LIFE YOU WANT IN A WORLD THAT IS MOVING FASTER AND FASTER

Schulte's book describes the web of forces that can make us feel stuck in a life that is going too fast - a life that includes little time for reflection and joy. Outdated assumptions at work, new expectations around intensive parenting, the ever present ping of technology pulling our attention in multiple directions, can all make us all feel like we are on a gerbil wheel with no exit.

Schulte's book also helps us see there is a better way. Like a mobile that can be influenced by multiple positive forces, Schulte highlights different leverage points for change that can work in concert to create a world where everyone – parents and nonparents, young and old, executive and hourly wage worker – can create more satisfying lives.

Schulte gets us to discuss the right questions by asking, "What if not just women, but both men and women, worked smart, more flexible schedules? What if the workplace itself was more fluid than the rigid and narrow ladder to success of the ideal worker? ... And what if both men and women became responsible for raising children and managing the home, sharing work, love, and play? Could everyone then live whole lives?" Use this guide to learn more about both the big picture as well as more immediate ways we can all make changes.

PART ONE TIME CONFETTI

Schulte quickly learns overwhelm isn't just a personal problem it's a topic being experienced and researched globally. She even describes scientific research that shows how our modern times are negatively impacting our ability to think. How have you experienced overwhelm?

Q: If you kept a time diary, what three activities would consume the majority of your time?

Q: How often do you feel like you are experiencing "contaminated time" - the mental noise that races around in our heads while we are trying to focus on something else?

Q: In contrast, if "flow" is when we are fully engaged in an activity without distraction, and flow is also at the root of creativity, how often have you experienced flow? What were you doing? Did it feel enjoyable? Creative? Have you experienced flow at work *and* outside of work?

Q: If you could convert the time you waste being interrupted and distracted into a more effective and satisfying use of time, how would you use this time?

PART TWO WORK

Schulte takes a cold hard look at the fact that too many of our workplaces continue to reward the ideal worker – the person who arrives first in the morning, leaves last at night, is always ready for travel, and never turns off work even on vacation. But clearly this ideal is in direct conflict with the way most of us can, or want, to work.

Q: How have you been impacted by the increasing demands of a workplace that assumes you are available 24/7? How do ideal worker norms impact you?

Q: What can you learn from the examples of the progressive workplaces included in the book? What do you think the organization of the future will look like?

Q: Who could you talk to – at work or outside of work – to find ways to reduce chronic overwork, increase flexibility and improve you and your colleagues' effectiveness at work?

PART THREE LOVE

*Schulte then shifts her focus to what's happening at home – highlighting **Jessica DeGroot and ThirdPath Institute**. It's here that she describes the “enormously powerful cultural expectations” that shape the actions in our private lives, “the work-devoted ideal worker, the self-sacrificing ideal mother, and the distant provider father.” What she learns is how these “norms get us into the overwhelm, and the overwhelm keeps us from having the time to imagine a way out.”*

Q: Why have so many American families resisted the fact that dads have a parenting instinct? How does an increase in men's involvement at home not only change things for women and children, but also for our workplaces?

Q: How does the cult of intensive motherhood contribute to our sense of overwhelm? Why does the ideal of the self-sacrificing mother persist? How do our fears about our children's ability to succeed exacerbate this problem? What is necessary to stop the insanity?

Q: What enabled Schulte to leave the kids behind and trust Tom? What were some of the most important steps Schulte took to create this more joyful division of labor at home?

PART FOUR PLAY

To better understand what happened to leisure time Schulte travels to Denmark. She chooses Denmark because time studies report Danish women have more leisure than any other countries studied. Later in this section, she talks to the founder of the National Institute for Play who also reminds us that through play, “The brain creates rich new neural connections that fire together in new ways.”

Q: What did you learn from Schulte's trip to Denmark? How would the concept of *hygge* – embracing the beauty and warmth in the simple moments – increase time for play in your life?

Q: What messages does our current society convey about the definition of success? Is the “pursuit of happiness” – as touted in the Declaration of Independence – still valued in America?

Q: One of the findings presented in *Overwhelmed* is the notion that grit and self confidence, not income or GPA, are strong predictors of happiness. What has brought the most joy in your life?

PART FIVE TOWARD TIME SERENITY

The focus of Schulte's book is to show how “overwhelm” is more than a mommy issue – it is a “sustainable living, healthy populations, happy families, good business, sound economics, and living a good life” issue. Her book helps us begin to understand the big picture changes that are required to create more satisfying lives – both at work and at home. This last section describes some of the more immediate steps you can take to start putting some of these ideas into practice.

ThirdPath has also developed a variety of resources to help you on this journey – including our **OMG! Overwhelm Mitigation Groups**. With 15+ years of experience supporting parents and leaders create an integrated approach to work and life, we've learned a lot about how to push back at our sense of overwhelm and create a more satisfying approach to work and life.

To learn more about ThirdPath's many resources, go to: www.ThirdPath.org/get-help