

Transformative Flex

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Want flexibility? Sure, you can work 70-hours a week anywhere you want. Striving for better work/life balance? That's fine, just don't let it get in the way of the expanding list of tasks we've assigned to you. Care about diversity? Work as hard as I do, and we'll be happy to consider you as potential leadership material. ***If this is how you think, stop reading now.***

This article is for everyone else - professionals who are interested in an integrated approach to work and life, and seeing how it results in wins for people, their organizations, and their families.

Those who have successfully found a way to balance work and life have discarded the outdated notion that a work-first and work-only approach is essential to business and the only route to success. Instead, they have adopted a paradigm shift, and reframed this binary assumption into one that recognizes that work matters AND life matters.

To follow this approach, these professionals became experts in two dimensions: flexibility and capacity management. Flexibility defines where and when someone works. It requires agility, and the ability to think outside the box when faced with competing goals.

Capacity management relates to how much work is expected to be done individually, as a team and within the organization. Capacity management requires innovation in how the work itself gets done such as prioritization, expectation management, and strategic delegation.

ThirdPath leaders are changing the rules.

Professionals who develop this new mindset, who were then promoted to managers, began to spread this approach to their teams - see diagram on page 2. Their integrated mindset helped them find triple win solutions for team members long before we faced a pandemic. It also helped them retain both male and female employees during the pandemic by setting collective boundaries around everyone's capacity for work as employees managed the unprecedented changes.

A few definitions:

- **Balance:** this happens in the moment - something that one physically "feels" as in "*I feel out of balance*"
- **Integration:** this happens in the long run - it's how you create multi-faceted lives, with paid work happening alongside other components
- **Work-First Work Cultures:** in these organizations, life needs are always subservient to work and career priorities
- **Triple Win Solutions:** flex options that are good for the individual, the work you do, *and* the people you work with
- **Collective Boundary Setting:** working together to set thoughtful limits around your capacity for work, so you have time and energy for life responsibilities, while helping your organization thrive

ThirdPath Leaders often began their journey in the lower left box where they negotiated changes at the personal level. To do this required courage, foresight, and the belief that individuals had the power to make change.

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| FLEX - Where, when we work | Whole Organization | | | Whole organization supports integration |
| | Whole Team ↑ | | Team supports flex & capacity management | |
| | Individual ↑ | Individuals flex and set win-win boundaries | | |
| | | Individual Accommodation → | Whole Team Supported → | Whole Organization Supported |
| CAPACITY MANAGEMENT - How much we work | | | | |

In Will’s case, he started his journey in the top left box. His organization has always supported lots of flexibility around where and when people work, but it is also a work-first workplace that sets very few limits around how much people work. Regardless, Will found the courage to negotiate a 4-day work week when his children were born because he and his wife jointly agreed that they both wanted to play an active role in raising their children. This joint perspective also gave him the courage to later negotiate a 5-month sabbatical so he and his family could tour the country in a Winnebago when their children were school-aged. Then later in his career it gave him the courage and clarity to set limits around how much work he could take on as he and his wife balanced their work with the care of aging parents.

ThirdPath Leaders can influence change within a box, or by moving across the matrix. Their success depends in part on their individual skills and in part on the openness of their organization’s culture - ***openness the leader may be able to influence, or openness because leaders leave for more supportive organizations, or start their own organizations.*** Movement across the matrix can happen by role modelling, where others see the leader’s success, and then want to do the same. It can also happen in a very planned manner as leaders intentionally develop the necessary skills in their teams to support work-life integration for all (e.g., by cross training team members so that each person can take a vacation without checking in).

Our work with ThirdPath Leaders has also shown us, once leaders experience the deep satisfaction, joy, and improved work effectiveness from following this approach - it strengthens their commitment to influence even greater change.

Start your work-life integration journey today. Join one of ThirdPath’s Overwhelm Mitigation Groups – OMG! Learn more by searching: ThirdPath OMG