



ON BALANCE

A photovoice project by Dr. Maria Quinlan

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Foreword

At AIB our purpose is to back our customers to achieve their dreams and ambitions. Our people are at the heart of realising this and it's very important to me that we are doing all we can to make this a place where people can bring their energy and talent in a way that adds to their sense of meaning and well-being.

Sadly, research conducted in 2017 showed that 40% of people would conceal a mental health difficulty from colleagues, friends, and even family. Here in AIB Technology, we want to create an environment where people can be open and honest about how they are feeling, both physically and mentally. To allow people to bring their best true-self to the fore, every day.

During the month of May thousands of green ribbons will be distributed nationwide, giving people the opportunity to show their support for those suffering from mental health difficulties. This year we partnered with See Change, a national organisation in Ireland tasked with reducing stigma surrounding mental illness.

As part of Green Ribbon Month, we partnered with Dr. Maria Quinlan, Sociologist at University College Dublin, using a method called photovoice to explore perspectives on how we blend work life and personal life. This initiative appealed to me because in order to participate, people need to find space in their thoughts to see the world around them and have the courage to share their insights with others. This is easier said than done as so many of us unconsciously fill any quiet moment with noise or the glare of a screen.

The response was inspirational and in total the participants selected close to 50 photos to caption and share as part of this project. Their images and insights are powerful, moving, and evocative. The people who participated with such generosity have set an example for all of us.

You don't need to be an expert to start talking about mental health and to help those around you. Sometimes the most helpful thing you can do is to simply let someone know you are there for them and willing to listen. But before you do this you must make sure you are listening to yourself, to that inner voice that will lift you up if you let it. For me this is about a little more focus on *being* and a little less *doing*.

Tim Hynes,

Chief Information Officer, Allied Irish Bank

"We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us that they may see, it may be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer life because of our quiet."

- William Butler Yeats,
The Celtic Twilight: Faerie and Folklore






Introduction

The concept of 'work/life balance' is one that is often discussed, but one which is not as often explored in-depth in terms of what it actually means to us in our day to day lives. It is not a concept that is frequently evaluated and unpacked at an individual employee-level. In this project we wanted to get under the skin of what exactly 'work/life balance' means for people working within AIB Technology – how they define it, how they balance their work and life goals and responsibilities within this organisation, and what the enablers or challenges to doing so are.

Thus the aim of this project is to explore AIB employees' thoughts, feelings and experiences of balancing their work and life commitments, aspirations and goals. Their experiences were captured via an innovative method of participatory photography known as photovoice. Photovoice is a research and advocacy method which uses photographs, coupled with facilitated group discussion and photo-captioning to give voice to people's lived experience of a particular issue¹.

The business case for individuals adopting, and organisations promoting, better work-life balance is clear and yet both individuals and organisations struggle to break out of always-on, high-intensity patterns of work². According to Professor Joan Williams and colleagues from the University of California, despite vast amounts of research supporting a need for greater balance and integration of work and home aspirations, this research has had relatively little impact on workplace practice, and work-family conflict is at an all-time high.

Work life balance is often seen as a parent's issue, and can be side-lined as a mother's issue specifically. However recent research has found that a majority of employees - men and women, parents and nonparents - struggle, often painfully, with how to balance work pressure with other parts of their lives³. For the purposes of this project we wanted to dive deeper into the issue, to understand and give voice to the variety, complexity and diversity of preferences,



needs and ideal ways of working. With that end in mind this photovoice project was conducted with a group of twelve AIB Technology employees - the group contained an equal split of both men and women; people from each pillar within AIB Technology; an age span ranging from those in their 20s to those in their 50s; parents and non-parents; and people from six different nationalities. Together they took and selected just under 50 photographs to share within this exhibition.

The photographs and stories which accompany them are intimate portraits of how we live and how we work. There is an intimacy in their simplicity – dinner tables, children's bags and toys, birthday cakes, daily commutes, early-morning starts, lunch with colleagues. A portrait of community in and out of the office emerges; nature, sport, family, friends, connection. The participants speak of being empowered and enabled by AIB to make life work for them through the ability to work flexibly. The move to Central Park, and the new flexible ways of working which it has afforded, are highlighted as having an important and positive impact on the group's ability to balance their working life with their activities and responsibilities outside of the office. This flexibility enables people to fully-participate in family-life and in the life of their community. Be it via choirs, parent teacher associations, coaching football or basketball teams – the group highlight the importance of having the time to give back to, and to add-value to, their communities.

Participants also highlight the importance of having time to stay connected, both to themselves, and to others. Having time and space to spend in nature, playing sports, traveling, socialising and having fun with friends and family are all highlighted as important factors in maintaining physical, mental and emotional well-being. Thus we can see how an organisations' ability to foster a culture, climate and ways of working which allow people to balance work in a way that enables them to incorporate these things into their lives, can be said to be engaged in truly supporting employees to flourish holistically.

The group also spoke about the give and take which they perceive as inherent in the organisation - they are encouraged to work smarter rather than harder, and to focus on output rather than hours spent at their desks. There is a loyalty and commitment which emerges from the data, an organisational cultural maturity which encourages people to focus on getting the job done in a way that is win-win. People work out of normal hours as and when needed, and feel both supported and empowered by the organisation to manage their work and life in a way that works effectively for them.

Putting the employee voice at the centre

We have chosen photovoice as a tool to explore this issue, as it is a creative method which allows for a more in-depth, nuanced exploration of a topic - and as the issue of work/life balance is a multi-layered, complex phenomenon, it is a method ideally suited to facilitating participants to explore and represent their thoughts and feelings in this area.

Photovoice helps articulate the human stories within an organisation and allows us to understand issues of culture, climate and employee-engagement in a deeply nuanced manner. It helps us to understand the concept of 'work/life balance' as it is defined, understood and practiced by individual employees. Using photographs to give voice to people, who often feel unheard and unseen is a person-centred and co-created methodology that can be both a powerful and positive experience for the participants while also being an impactful way of providing deep insight into an issue for the wider organisation and indeed society.

The photovoice method is part of the Participatory Action Research tradition (PAR). PAR focuses on research which is a means and an end – in other words it is real-world applied research which leads to direct, practical action and change, while at the same time engaging and empowering the people taking part in the project. It is research by and with employees rather than 'on' employees. As such it taps into the biggest resource an organisation has, and preferences

their voice. A sense that your voice matters can seem like a fluffy 'soft' concept and yet it is found over and over to be central to providing the right context within which innovation and productivity flourish⁴.

Creating space for employees to share their stories, fears, concerns, and hopes is key to achieving inclusive, happy workplaces. There is a large body of research which supports the idea that employees who feel heard and seen by their organisations are happier and more engaged – and happy workers are more effective, compassionate, and less likely to suffer burnout⁵.

Methodology

The project was conducted over three weekly two-hour workshops – the workshop process incorporated five key elements;

- Creation of 'safe-space'
Space where people feel comfortable to share their feelings and experiences.
- Introduction to visual literacy
Creative exercises to get people comfortable using the method.
- Facilitated group discussion
Participants decide / agree on themes to guide their photo-taking.
- Sharing of photos
Each week the group share and explain selected photos.
- Final selection and captioning
Each person selects photos to share and is facilitated in captioning process.

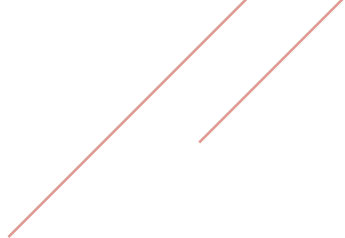
In the first week the group was introduced to the aims and objectives of the overall project and to the photovoice methodology – no prior photographic experience was required for participation. Based on

the overall aims and objectives of the project, the group discussed their own work/life balance and brainstormed the themes that they felt they would like to explore via photographs over the three-week project timeframe. The following list of broad themes were used to loosely guide their photo-taking over the period of the project:

- What does 'Work/Life Balance' mean to you?
What does it look like?
- Who am I when I'm not at work?
- How does 'work' fit into my overall life?
- 'A Day in My Life'
- How does AIB do in terms of supporting your Work/Life balance?
- What works well here? What could be improved?
- What are the challenges/enablers to achieving more of what you want in life/work overall?
- How can AIB help?
- What would 'ideal' look like?

Informed consent from participants was obtained over a phased basis and the project was managed as per the PhotoVoice Organisation's statement of ethical practice⁶.

ON BALANCE



AIB On Balance





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When I was thinking about the photos I was thinking of my own work/life balance, and the neighbourhood concept is something that we talk about in AIB...around Dublin every neighbourhood has their traffic light boxes coloured and I pass this one on my way home everyday day, and in my head I say 'ooh aah Paul McGrath, nearly home' so that kind of brings me back to my own neighbourhood.



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I spotted this over beside the green bins – I'm an agile coach so this made me laugh when I saw 'fragile', so I kind of thought of work/life balance and how it might work out some days and others it might not, but you kind of put it out, get it recycled and start afresh the next day...That particular day when I was walking out, we'd had a few workshops and there was a lot of challenge in the room...different opinions, not all agreement, which was really good and challenging so there's a fragility around the 'how we work' concept if we don't listen to each other and have balance.



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This is around the idea of inclusivity, not the fact that it's a toilet sign, but that we have signs up that say 'inclusive'. In terms of work/life balance, everyone plays a part in where we work. In our old offices, you went one way or you went the other – here we all go through the same door and you see this inclusive sign.



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This is the Spinc (in Glendalough) last Saturday. Since the change in where we work I now spend a lot of my day on the M50 looking at the mountains on the way to work as most people probably do. It's focused me on the fact that they are there, they're on my doorstep, so I've gone to the Wicklow mountains and the Dublin mountains a lot more since we moved here. So at the weekend I passed the turn-off (for Central Park) instead of coming in, and it's just a different path, a different view.



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This is a picture from when I was at the airport. My sister is one of my best friends but she lives in the UK, my battery had died, so this is the concept of staying charged and connected. So that's my work/life balance, if I don't talk to her I feel out of sync.



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I had to go to a funeral today. I am raised an atheist and don't believe in the existence of God, but this funeral was held in a church, where the departed person was a regular goer. It made me think about my own death, and what I would like my funeral to be. It's a time when friends and family get together and celebrate a person's life.

I have spotted this big Jesus Christ hanging from the ceiling, on a cross, and my first thought was: well he didn't have any work-life balance. Literally the job killed him!

While the gathered people were saying good-byes to the person who had died, there was no mention of work as such! I think that's what I want my funeral to be. I want to feel loved, remembered for how I was a great Parent, Friend, Wife, Person, and not just how I was good at my job, or that I got a critical project over the line. To me that's kind of work/life balance. That is a long term goal, and helps to put certain things in to a perspective.



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About two years ago we learned that my office will be moving to a location much further away from where we were based at the time. Myself and my husband embarked on a journey of buying a house at the same time. This photo was taken in the apartment we were renting in Raheny at the time. There was a lot of thinking and compromise made over time, as moving to opposite side of the city could have meant that we lose our friends network that we had. As neither of us have family here, our friends become our family, so it was an important factor in our decision. We knew that we will still be able to see each other, but it was never going to be the same, as we all used to live in the neighbourhood.

The time has passed, and we bought a beautiful forever home near my new office location. This picture represents me saying good bye to our friends, and hello to our new life. It now takes me about 20 minutes to get in to work, and I can come and leave any time I need (within reason). I am working from home quite a lot more now, even though I live so close. And the best part? If something goes wrong with the technology in my house, I just get in to the office! No regrets! Oh and my friends? We still see each other over the weekends, and over time, we have all de-centralised from the old location. Life goes on, people change, circumstance change, what do we do? Adapt!



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My mom is an immigrant, and a single mother. We grew up in the environment and a government that doesn't exist anymore, but I truly believe that when my mom was growing up, she was also told, just like myself – that she can do anything. When she finished college with a degree in train engineering, she was sent to work abroad, and that was a reality for many people at the time.

My mom is an inspiration and a true “boss woman” who had changed careers, climbed to the heights of her career in both fields, and did all that while still having no family around her, and being a single mom. I think I also resent my mom for not giving me the time I needed from a parent growing up. I remember many evenings and times when I was left alone in the house, and these days this is not imaginable that a parent would be allowed to do this. But I don't think I was alone growing up like this, and as a millennial it seems to be common trend, as all most of us want is attention and recognition. I remember thinking when I was older and immigrated myself “I just don't want to be like my mom” meaning I don't want to be a single mom, who will have to leave her kid alone at home just to earn the money to support this small family. I knew I wanted to be married, and I knew I wanted to have a big family around me. My mom was never alone, but yet seemed so lonely at times.

Every morning I would be greeted by an image of my mother putting make up on in a mirror just like this, placed on a kitchen window still. It was the “hello” and “good bye” for our brief morning interactions. She would always have a cup of coffee, steaming from the cup beside it. This makes me so emotional just thinking about this, but this is the image best imprinted in to my memory. I am about to become a mother myself, I am in a different place than my mom, not better, not worse, just very different.



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These are my kids, this was last week and we were heading away for the weekend. For me the good thing about working here, is that my kids love coming in. Rather than I pick up them up after work they wanted to get the Luas up and come into the office!...so this is the two of them messing outside the office in the beehive before coming in. They like coming in and playing with the Microsoft Surfaces in the meeting rooms when they get a chance...there's never any issue with them coming in, they know some of the people in the office now so they're always looking to see them, what they're doing, what they are up to. Unless you were happy here you wouldn't feel like bringing your family and your kids into the office so it is a happy environment to be here and they can see that.



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This is down in Connemara, it was typical Connemara weather but we found this place and we went in, it was a glass shop. They had glass sheep that the kids were looking at and my son Jack was looking to buy one for his room, but then the lady in the shop said well actually you can make one. So we ended up doing a workshop there just on the spur of the moment, cutting the glass and melting it in a kiln so it all comes together. This was just one of the activities that we did while we were down there.



© Brian | 2019 | On Balance

This is on the Sky Road up in Connemara, I was doing a marathon there and this is the day before. The scenery is amazing there so it was great to bring the kids around to show them a different part of the country...I think if they see us doing different sports and activities then they see that that's a good thing for them as well.



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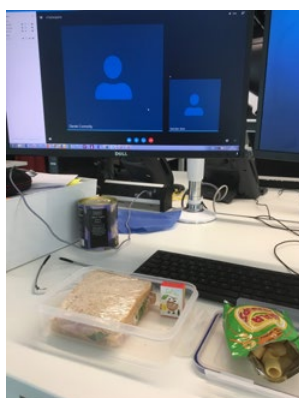
This is my colleague Paul, and the point of this picture really is that unless you have fun in work, there's no life. It is not just about life outside of work, you need life, fun in work. No matter how bad things get, because projects get stressful – so unless you can destress in work and have a bit of fun, there's no point really.



© Brendan | 2019 | On Balance

This is Monday night dinner at my house. I left work late, the weather was bad but the traffic was good and I rolled into the house just as people were having dinner, so I sat down with everybody else. You'll see there's four dirty plates there, if you look carefully you'll see there's an indicator for everyone – my son's got a ball at the table, my daughter has lego and there's my wife's glasses and my glasses all at the table. So it was just good to get home, in terms of work/life balance if you can get out of here early enough you can still make it home on time for dinner. I don't get home for dinner as much as I'd like, but more and more I'm able to get home earlier, more regularly.

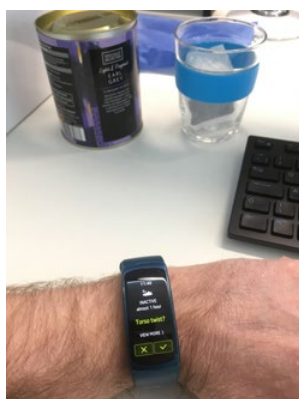
The theme really is that you can choose, some people might say at 5:00 I'm out of here like a shot and I don't think about work until I come back, some people on the other hand are very happy to work longer hours and do different things, but it's kind of up to you. Nobody makes you stay except for yourself so if you're staying, chances are it's your own decision so I was thinking, you can make the decision and get out there and be home for dinner if that's what you want...It's not about being here I don't think, it should be about your output.



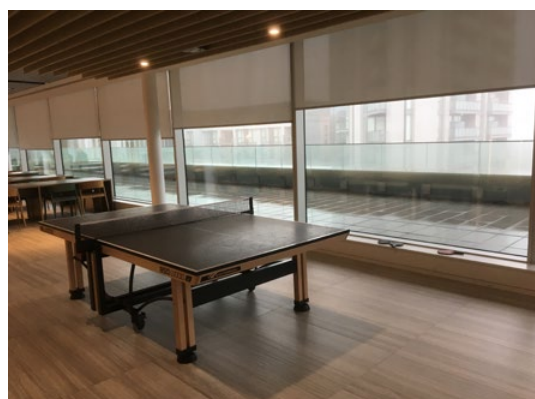
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I've tried to juxtapose these two photos. There's two lunch photos here – the first one I had meetings the whole day and at lunchtime I was on Skype, so while the other guys were talking away I was having my Hula Hoops. So there's one day where you're stuck at your desk because you're part of a meeting that you have to attend and then the next day, I took the same lunchbox but I had my lunch up in the canteen with the rest of the guys. So again, that's a choice and sometimes you have to be on your own and you have to attend meetings, but other times you can go up with the lads and have lunch in the canteen and have some fun instead – it doesn't cost you much extra effort, to be up there for the craic. When you can you should decide to do what makes you happy.



© Brendan | 2019 | On Balance



These two photos are about activity. I have a smart watch and it tells me when I haven't been active for a while, and there's a cup of tea on my desk which I've been trying to drink since the morning but I haven't had a chance. My watch has told me 'you've been sitting on your butt for a whole hour, do you want to move around a bit, shake it up?' I get those message fairly often.

Again it's your choice, you could sit at your desk all day or you can choose to walk to someone's desk instead of calling or mailing them. The next photo is of the table tennis upstairs and it's funny because there's no one at it in this photo but that's not usually how it is. Usually if you go up there you'd struggle to get a game of table tennis because people are always at it. If you look at the paddles you can see that they're worn around the edges so you can actually see they are really well used. This is showing that there is an opportunity here to get exercise if you want, you're not forced to sit at your desk. Maybe the reason we sit at our desks is that's what we want or that we haven't thought about it enough. You've got a choice.



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For myself moving to Central Park, I'm one of the winners in terms of the move, because by my leaving home at 6.15 to drive into work, I'm able to get a parking spot in what I call the Bat Cave. One of the most pleasurable experiences is coming in to an empty car park – it doesn't phase me getting up so early, but it's the give and take. By coming in at 6:30, I get so much work done in the morning – I probably upset some of my work colleagues because by the time they come in, they have emails from me in their inbox, but after 30+ years working in banking, this is a big win for me – to be able to come in early and finish early and have that work/life balance. You don't feel guilty going home, you've done more than enough hours and it's the give and take – some days you'd stay on if there's meetings but I'd have no problem getting up and leaving at 2:30/3:00 and I feel supported by management in doing so.



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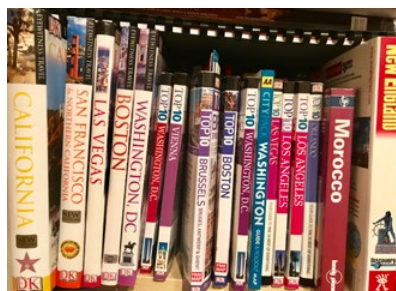
This was last year and the famous storm, this was before we moved to Central Park – because of my early start even back then, I was leaving home at 6:05 to try and get parking near Burlo. At the time I left for work, it was an Orange alert, so I drove in, slowly, and found a parking spot about 5 minutes from work. But then at around 7:00, the weather warning was upgraded to a Red alert, do not travel, do not pass go! My role within the team was business continuity management so I had to make sure everyone was contacted and told not to attempt to come into work. If they had remote access, by all means work at home. Our Executive Manager said don't worry, if you don't have remote access, even if you're a contractor, you will be paid. It's a free day, you can't do anything about it.

Then things were obviously shut down for two/three days – yes there was the work/life balance, but it was driven by the company. It was very much driven from the top down and it was most appreciated. We know from looking at other companies around Ireland that people may not have been getting paid for those days, but that was a case of the give and take again shown by the Technology Senior Management Team, and in terms of staff, it wasn't for the want of trying, we tried to come into work.



© Gabriel | 2019 | On Balance

This is a tree in the back garden. I planted that tree over 25 years ago and when you look back on it, you come and go, but when you come home, things are moving on. The tree has a life of patience – it can't move anywhere but maybe that tree will be there long after I'm gone. It gives me something to go yes, I still feel young, but when you look out and see something has grown so much, it gives me a sense that things are moving on, you are getting older, because the tree is showing its age. So you move into different territory and always make sure that you're continuing to focus on having that work/life balance.



© Gabriel | 2019 | On Balance

What I live for is holidays, my rule of thumb is that I will never come home from one holiday without the next holiday booked. Sometimes I'd be three holidays ahead of myself, or for West End shows I'd be 18 months ahead of myself to get to see Hamilton etc. So in terms of work/life balance, I know from talking to managers, even going back a few years, they weren't even taking their holidays. No, listen, you get a holiday entitlement, use it! Don't sacrifice it, you're not going to be rewarded by your family for working every single hour that God sends you. Obviously people have different ambitions as to where their holidays may be, it makes no difference – I don't care if I'm just driving down to the country, it doesn't have to be abroad, but I do get a lovely feeling seeing a plane, so that is my go-to.



© Gabriel | 2019 | On Balance

I had one job yesterday and that was to pick up a birthday cake for a family birthday at home before making dinner, so the cake had been ordered and I was just waiting in the queue to collect the cake. You can go to the bakery, you have the cake ordered, you can get home in time and you're sitting down at a respectable time to the family dinner and able to celebrate, opening presents or whatever and again that's important. I know myself if there's any family occasions or even work occasions that are outside of work where we're trying to just be friends and not be bogged down in work, just how important work/life balance is. That was a positive for me, being able to pick up the birthday cake on the way home and then to be able to sit down having made the dinner.



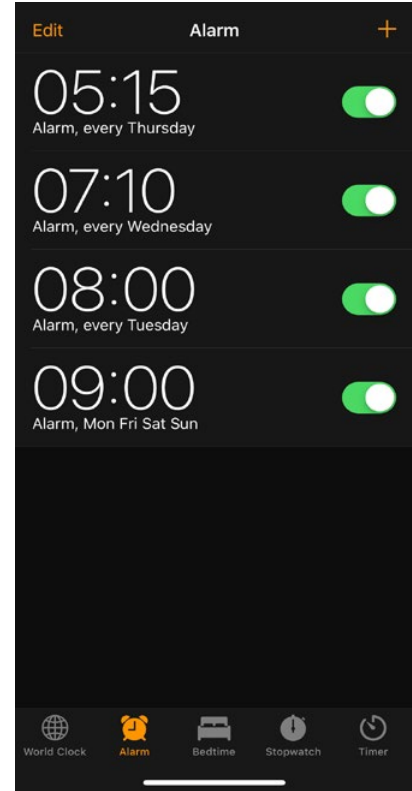
© Janet | 2019 | On Balance

This represents holidays. I live for holidays, I always have something planned, something to look forward to. For me work/life balance, it's about life, it's not about work – 100%. I live for my holidays, my family, my trips away, my time out of here. So the suitcase packed at the front door is very important – it's a regular occurrence. This was half-unpacked from the last trip and just about to get ready for the next one!



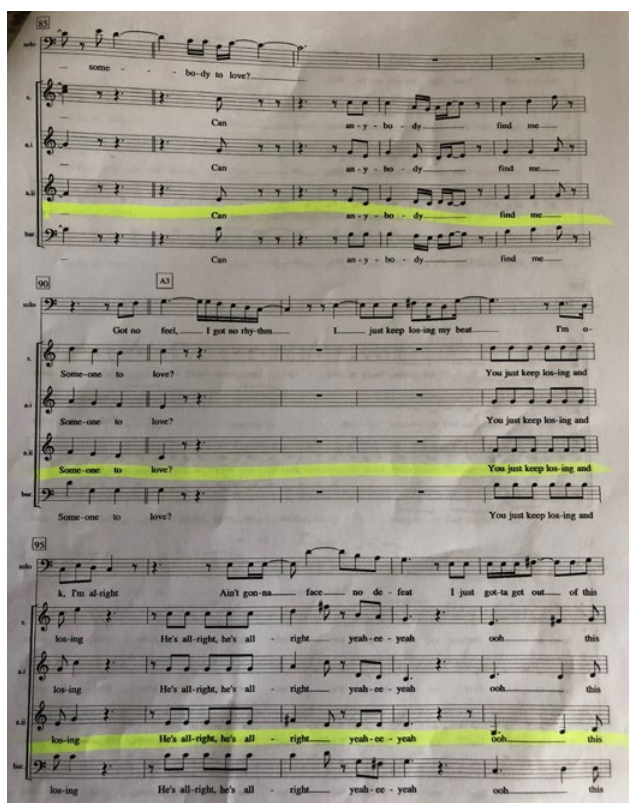
© Janet | 2019 | On Balance

This is High Rock in Malahide. I grew up in Malahide and I've done many swims from there, including Christmas day swims. I walk past it at least once a week, and you know, it blows away the cobwebs. It's just a great spot, I love the strength of the sea, when the wind is blowing it up like that, I love it.



© Janet | 2019 | On Balance

This tells the story of work/life balance. So if you look at this, you'll see on a Thursday I come in to work in Central Park so I get up at 5:15am. On a Wednesday I work in O'Connell Street so I get up at 7:10am; on a Tuesday I work from home so I get up at 8:00am; and I don't work Monday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. That sums up my life and you can see – who wants to get up at 5:15am? If we weren't given the flexible options that we have been given – if I wasn't working a three-day week, if I had to come on site into Central Park every day, I'd be getting up at 5:15am five days a week and that would kill me. This represents the ideal work/life balance!



© Janet | 2019 | On Balance

So this is music – I'm in a choir outside of work, it's great craic. Don't get me wrong, I'm not a great singer, but I can sing along with anything. This sheet music has my part highlighted. I'm only learning the auld reading music bit! We have rehearsals every Tuesday, if we're in a competition we might have more rehearsals. We have great weekends away when we are in competitions. Choir means a lot to me, it's very social, I joined just over a year ago I have met such lovely, lovely people. It's something I really enjoy, I love it, it's great.



© Janet | 2019 | On Balance

This is our kitchen table, before dinner. Set for four people – myself, my husband and my two sons. Everybody has their own place, and that's where we have the chat and the 'what did you do today', and 'what's coming up' conversations. If friends call, it's around the kitchen table that we have the chat – it's where all the news, what's happening, gets discussed. It's a very social space. So it means a lot.



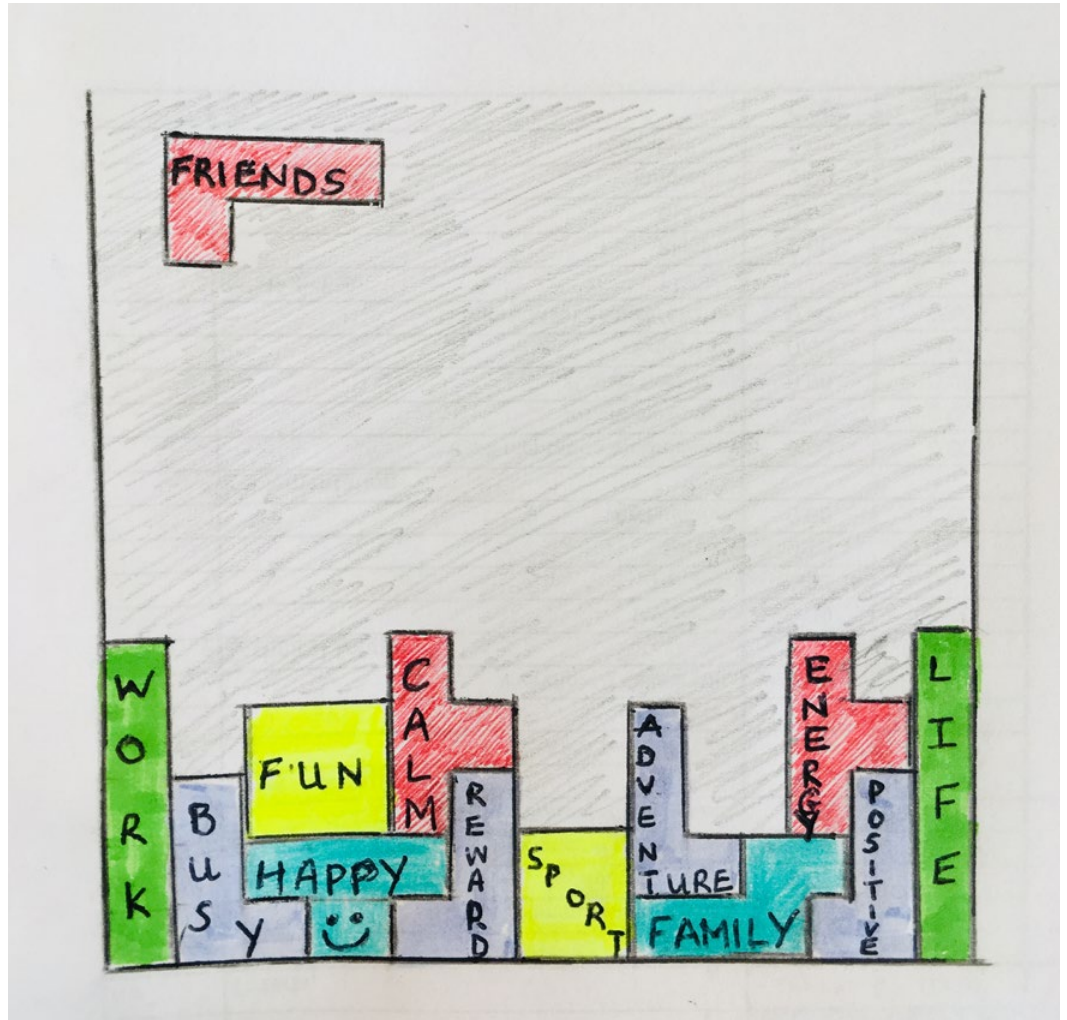
© Lynn | 2019 | On Balance

I took this photo last summer – when the weather's nice we like to go out and Kayak. I was looking through old pictures trying to get inspiration for what photographs I'd take and I saw this and thought, we definitely weren't thinking about work when we were out there!



© Lynn | 2019 | On Balance

This is kind of similar in context to the first photo. My dad and brother are heavily involved in GAA, so I always have two hurlies and a couple of sliotars in my boot – I gathered a few more for this picture. It's something that I like to do when I'm not working – and it's nice to have the opportunity that I can do my past-times, and I'm not held back by work. So yeah, I like to go out and puck a few balls with my friends or with myself.



© Lynn | 2019 | On Balance

I guess everybody's probably familiar with the Tetris computer game. So I have work on one side and life on the other, and then all the words in between are my interpretation of work/life balance, or what it is for me anyway. I'm not quite sure why I have put friends up so high, but I guess the idea is that it all fits in together, for me anyway.



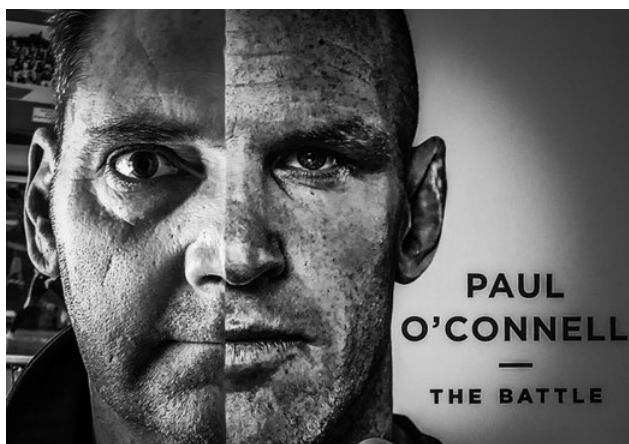
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Football is what I do outside of here. This year it's reasonably quiet I'm only at it three days a week. Other years I'm effectively doing it seven days a week outside of here. I'm a coach, I like coaching and I suppose I apply the same kind of ideals in work as I do to football. People tend to do well if they're told what's expected of them and what to do – and coaching is that, to actually improve what they're doing. Apart from the actual sport aspect, it goes further than that, it's actually also helping to mentor and coach their lives because while it's an adult team, we've a predominantly young group - we've ten people on the starting team who are 23 or younger. So it's a very young team to be playing in Dublin senior football. So it's everything, it's their lives, how to balance sport, studies, training other stuff – it's just about helping them. We've an awful lot of guys, especially at a younger age who are not quite there in terms of work or careers and they need help. They come to myself or the other coaches or managers with issues or problems and you just try to help them, talk them through it. Each year there's something, guys with mental health problems, or dropping out of college, all sorts of stuff. We're there to help them, it's not just a football thing, and it becomes more than that, and it's almost like a family.

We're aspiring to win our championship this year so it's also making them mentally tough, I suppose helping them

to become men. We're playing in tough leagues, stuff going on off and on the ball. Conditioning them to cope with that while playing football, being mentally tough yet playing sport, doing the right things, thinking under pressure, all that kind of thing. So it consumes my entire life – it's just what I like doing. I love the fact that AIB sponsor GAA club games. Obviously you have to work to fund your life, but after that it's sport and the benefits of sport and having the craic and the community spirit really go hand in hand after that. So I just enjoy it, I enjoy having the craic with the people who are coaching and the teams I've coached in the past have had some level of success. I'm still in contact with many of them even though they are dispersed around Dublin, and the country.

You try to work harder rather than smarter, and in football you try to play smarter not harder. Sometimes going 100 miles an hour isn't the best way to approach something. If you take a step back, think about how you could do it better, quite often there are efficiencies that you can gain from a little bit of thought into it, which is what we try to do in work here as well. By doing that in work it allows me the time to spend on coaching. Sometimes work scales up but in general those are the unforeseen issues and problems, but in general work is ok with us getting out and doing whatever we have to do.



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Flexible working provides you with the chance to manage your time to suit you. It lets you do what you want to do, when you want to do it. I think about death every day. I think about existence and non-existence and it's a tremendous motivator. You're always running faster when you're being chased. I'm in my 54th year and I figure that I'm going to dedicate myself to doing what I really want to do and not necessarily what I should be doing! One thing that I didn't get to do when I was really busy with work and had less of an opportunity to be flexible and manage my time was read books. I miss reading but I'm going to make up for lost time.



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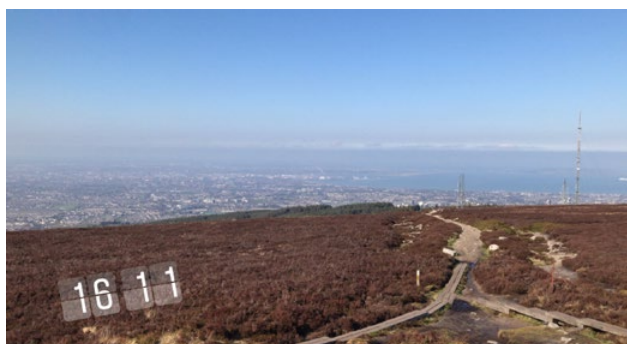
Again with time, time is really important and I was calculating the fact that I've been shaving I think for 39 years, and when you add it up it's over 80 days of my entire life that I've devoted to shaving. I hate shaving, I hate it. It's just one of those painful, mindless chores. It just reminds me that I'm not going to shave today, f**k it you know, I'm going to take back those ten minutes and do something I like!



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After my family, the most important thing that I do is I coach basketball. I've been doing it for a pretty long time and it's the coolest thing I do, I look forward to it each and every day when I have practice or a game. Even when I'm not coaching, I'm thinking about it. These are under 15 girls, so they are 14 and 15 year olds, and when you're able to give them instruction or advice and they do it, it's wonderful because firstly they are teenagers and they don't listen to anybody! ...and secondly the fact that they trusted me enough to try something that they don't think they can do and risk failure, which at 14, 15, nobody wants to fail. I try to teach them every day that it's ok to fail – you've got to push people to understand that failing is learning. I'll never ask them to do something they can't do, but I'll ask them to do something that they don't think that they can do.

It's my way of giving back for all the years that people have coached me and given their time so it's really important to me. If you're not doing something for the betterment of the community or for somebody else, you're just taking up good oxygen. Because out of these girls, somebody's going to cure cancer or they're going to develop a new and better Internet.



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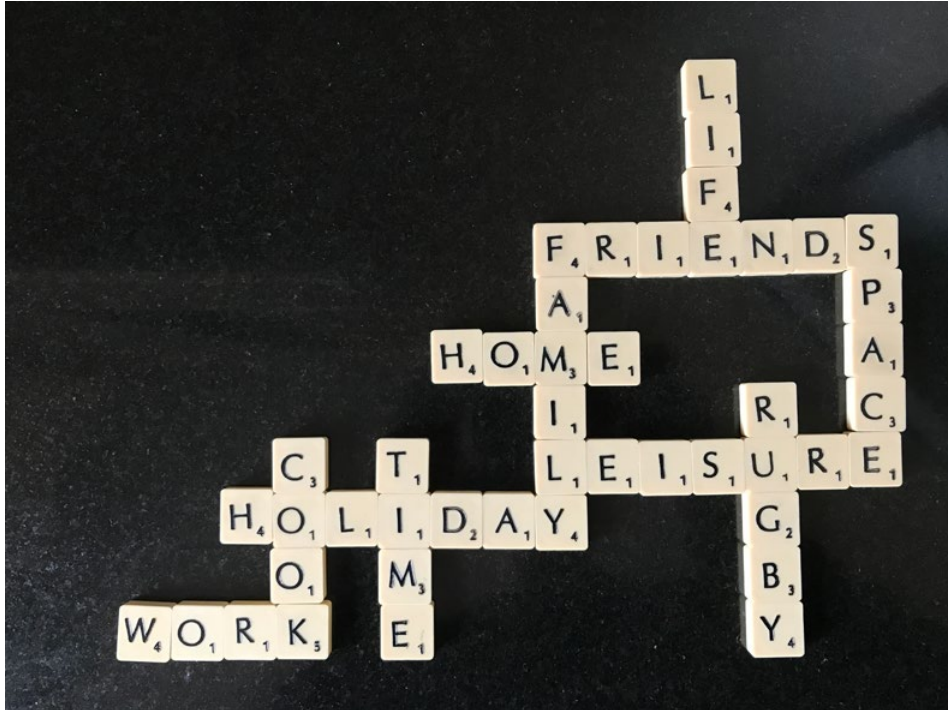
Getting out of work, when I can, at 4:00pm is good. I like to keep active, I do a lot of stuff outside of work. This is in Tibbradden which is up here close to the offices – so the fact that you can get up there so quickly...like I left work just before 4:00pm and I drove over there and then ran up the hill. The fact that I can do that and you get that nice contrast between there's work and I could be spending an hour going home or something, it's not that far from me. My boss lives in Skerries so he could take a long time going home, whereas I can get up the hill just after 4:00pm.

So it's just a nice contrast between finishing the day and doing something straight away rather than having to spend time going home, travelling and all that kind of stuff. It suits me so I'm trying to make the most of it, and getting the habits right at the beginning. That's the nice thing about this environment – it's one of the first places that I've worked. It's set up how I want to do things and hopefully that continues



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This is a picture of downstairs, the barrier. I just try to keep work in work and get outside as much as possible. Obviously there are times when you might have to come in on the weekend to finish something or log on at night, but if I can help it I leave it and I pick it up at 7:00am again the next day. It was just a nice visual of a barrier – keeping things in and out. If you can, you try to set a clear divider, your work and the rest of the stuff outside of it. Like Anita was saying, you don't want to be remembered necessarily as someone who just worked the whole time. There are other things to life, this is just a part of what you do.



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Work is there, it's something everyone does and it's a foundation to do all the things that I want to do outside of it. So while it is there, it's not at the top, it's not the important thing – so rather than work/life balance, I think work/life fit is probably more accurate. It's not necessarily a trade-off the whole time – we either do that or that, it's more that this helps me do all the other stuff that I want to do. You need to work to have the security, the finances, the resources etc. and that helps to support everything that you do outside of the building.



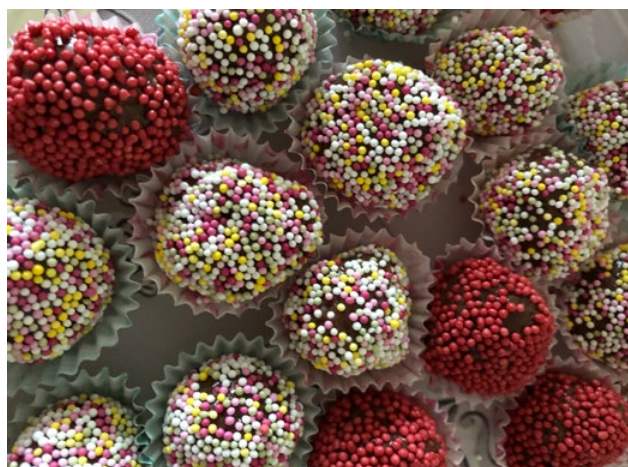
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This is the adult Christmas table, the kids have another table. There are 23 kids and this is just my generation and my parent's generation table. The thing I learned when I moved to Ireland was that I am able to have a work/life balance which I didn't have in Portugal – as a country we don't look at it the same way. So it's very good to be able to go home to Portugal, to go for Christmas and to actually stay for a few days. Occasionally I take the same as the kid's holidays so I stay for two weeks and I can work for one or two days from home in Portugal which is amazing. So I am with my family and I can still do the work, whatever needs to be done. It is a very positive thing, having the balance to be able to go home and still work. This is my Christmas day. Family comes first all the time and I wouldn't even think about Christmas without going home.



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I have been part of the PTA at my children's school for the last six years and we organise a lot of events to fundraise for the school. So that's my part in giving back for everything that they have given my children. It is also a way of meeting people, it was a way of understanding how school's work here, and it was a really good way of helping myself settle here, put down some roots where we are. It's a really good thing – because the mums from the school and the teachers are part of my Irish family. I have a very busy life, so this is part of the way I can give back to the school because they have been great to my kids.



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These are my kids' favourites, they are kind of small caramel and toffee balls, and they always ask me to bake them for any occasion. These were baked last week for the Easter party in school, usually they have a cake sale so this is what I baked. Someone usually remembers the day before at 7:00pm, "oh I need these for tomorrow morning!" so when they go to bed I stay up cooking or I have to get up early in the morning to finish them. We like to cook and our life is really a lot about food, so I'm teaching my kids how to cook properly and they love being around the kitchen and doing a lot of stuff. We organise the dinner, they cook several times a week, then we sit at the table and that's our day. It is within our culture to gather around the table, so in our get-togethers, our parties, we sit and we eat, and we eat and sit. When we get together it usually involves food. We eat late in the evenings which gives me time to cook.



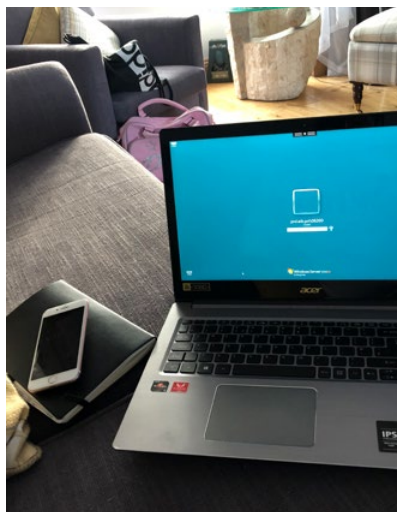
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My last picture is my city, Lisbon, taken from the plane. When I landed last Friday, I went back to bring my kids over for the Easter holidays – so I flew on Friday evening and back on Sunday evening. I was in between two pictures – this one was before landing and the other when leaving. So even though I consider Dublin my home, Portugal is home. So I have two homes and it's a really good balance working here but still being able to go back lots of times during the year. We go back like three, four, five times a year – so it's really good to be able to balance everything. To be able to balance my life here and back home.



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This was last Sunday evening. It was a rare occasion on a Sunday evening when dinner was done and all the ironing was done for getting ready for the week ahead, but we didn't have to make lunches because they're on midterm, so we were just finished earlier than we normally would be so we just said that we'd go out and get some ice-cream and just have quality time, just chatting. Sunday's it's normally right up to bedtime that you're getting ready for the week ahead, but it's nice to take the time to spend a little extra time together when you get the chance.



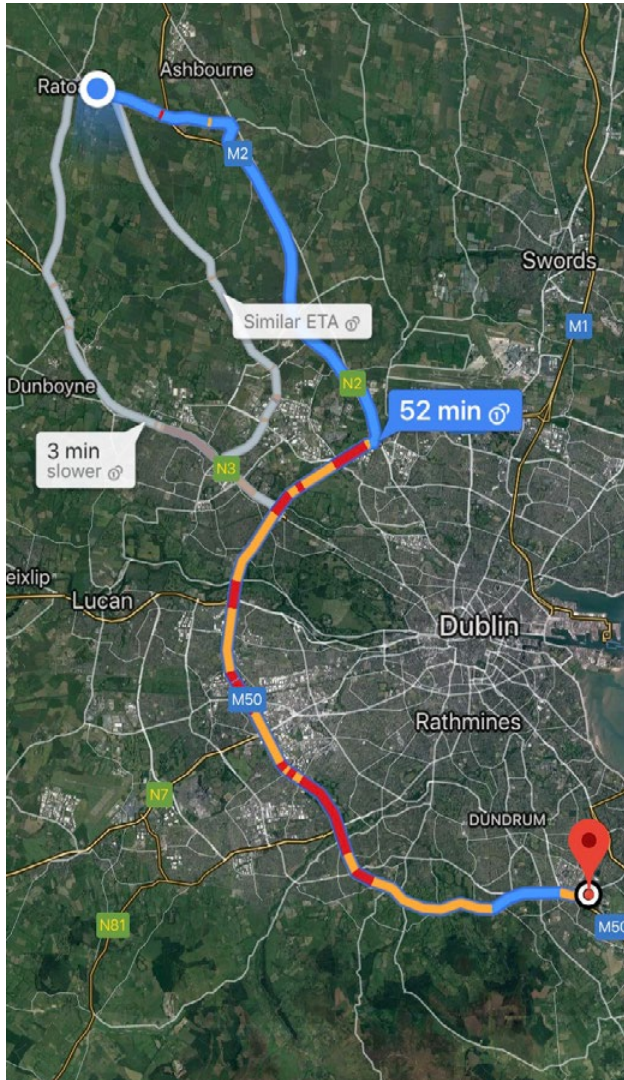
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This is me working from home which I feel quite lucky in AIB to have the opportunity to be able to do, to be able to work from home. The two bags in the background are my children's. One is my little girls' gymnastics bag and the other is my son's bag just for his football stuff. I tend to work from home the day that both of them have activities quite early in the evening so that when I'm done in work I'm done and I can be the one to bring them to their activities and I'm not relying on people to collect them and bring them and child minders and stuff like that so when I'm finished and I've done my hours and then I'm home. It's so much less stressful.



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This is just the kids' two iPads. On Sunday evening we were spending great quality time together but then there are times when, and I do feel guilty after it, but sometimes you just need some quiet time some space to even have a cup of tea or watch nothing on the telly – it's about balance I think though!



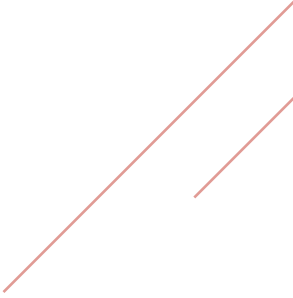
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This is a picture of the London Eye, and like everyone else was saying, I like to have things planned. I'm finishing today for ten days and we're going to London, the four of us, next Wednesday and have a nice break as a family. So I have this little trip planned and a nice summer holiday. It's nice to be able to do that, because if we didn't work we wouldn't have been the finances and we wouldn't be able to have the luxury of it – 'work to live and not live to work' as they say!!

So this is the journey to work, albeit on the Monday of the mid-term break so it wasn't as long as it normally is. This is me every morning I get into the car, the first thing I do is google maps from my location to work and it tells me how long it'll take for me to get there. Then in my head I'm thinking, 'how long am I going to get there, so what time can I leave at so that I'm home to the other things that I need to be doing'. So that's just a part of my day. If my husband's there in the morning I can leave at 6:00am and I'm here in 35 minutes, but otherwise it takes more than double that amount of time – it'll be one hour and fifteen minutes maybe, if I leave at 7:15am.



Afterword

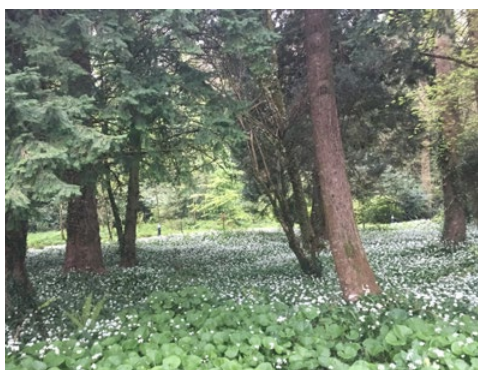
These days, work-life balance can seem like an impossible feat. I've worked with AIB for almost 3 years now and am really interested in people, technology and how you can get the best from your career. I believe that if you can strike the right work life balance, everything else will fall into place.

I like to look for creative and innovative ways to engage people and to really get under the bonnet of what makes people tick. Work is an important part of our lives and it's important to get the fit right. Work-life balance means something different to every individual, and that's where the photovoice "On Balance" research project was born. It's something a little different, and it was great to receive the support of my leadership team in bringing it to life.

People are too often mandated into personal development opportunities, whereas this offers people the opportunity to look at the photos at their leisure and consider what the theme means for them. In the initial workshop, I saw first-hand how important flexibility is to the participants and how they had made the move to Central Park work for them. By the 3rd workshop, participants had created powerful, funny, moving imagery. The content was very personal and brought to life what it truly means to juggle all the important elements of our lives.

"On Balance" is a tremendous platform that brings all of their efforts to life. It also gives others the chance to reflect on the content and consider if it's something that resonates with them. Do they feel that it reflects their experience of working in Central Park, and if not – why not?

I've had time during this process to consider what balance means for me. I took this photo in Cavan recently. I was there for work reasons, but on the way back to my car the trees and flowers caught my attention. It looked really peaceful and I was thinking that I should go back soon with my family. (Jean)



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We all need to take time out to relax and at the beginning of the process I asked Tim what balance means for him.

You can just see the 'Happy Birthday' sign on the bookshelf and some leftover balloons in the background. I really value the opportunity to be still for long enough that the dog wants to come and rest on me. The kids used to do this but time marches on! ;-) (Tim)



© Tim | 2019 | On Balance

Jean O'Donnell
Technology Engagement Lead

Acknowledgments

I would like to firstly thank the twelve men and women who participated in this project for sharing their experiences with such openness, honesty and vulnerability. This project is fundamentally their work and would not have been possible without their generosity of time and spirit. It was a pleasure to work alongside of them on this project.

I would secondly like to thank AIB Technology, and particularly Jean O'Donnell, Wendy Beesley and Tim Hynes for their vision in understanding how the photovoice methodology could be used to both help give voice to the experience of employee within AIB, and to raise awareness regarding the issue of work/life balance.

Photovoice is a method that demands transparency and openness from participants with the aim of revealing truths. It takes an organisation that really wants to understand a topic to trust their employees with such a method. AIB is an example of such a company, unafraid of hearing what its employees have to say.

Dr. Maria Quinlan

About the Researcher

Dr. Maria Quinlan is a collaborating research fellow at University College Dublin (UCD), and Head of Research at the Institute of Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy (IICP). Maria is a sociologist who specialises in the use of creative, person-centred research methods which aim to facilitate people in sharing their lived experience. She is passionate about putting the participant at the centre of the research process and using methods which aim to empower people to become co-researchers and to share their stories. She has carried out a variety of projects within the area of organisational behaviour, diversity and inclusion, including an in-depth study of gender and career progression within the financial and professional services in Ireland. Maria is a former Human Capital consultant at Deloitte Ireland, and is the founder of the Pink Flower Company, a research consultancy which focuses on creating actionable insight regarding issues of equality and inclusion.

maria@pinkflowercompany.com
www.pinkflowercompany.com



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Design and cover illustration by Erin McClure Design

I created the cover illustration with watercolour washes, ink and pen to create an abstract backdrop, with a drawn stack of stones balancing on top of one another. The blue and rust brush marks are representational of the complex pattern of things we have going on in our lives - work, family, friends, commitments, hopes and dreams - it can look and feel busy when we are surrounded by it all. The stack of stones in the foreground represent the balanced lifestyle we aspire to, where one element sits calmly on top of the previous, silent and still.

info@erinmccluredesign.com

www.erinmccluredesign.com



