

# Living to Work or Working to Live?

By VIANCA T. MALICK

**A**fter my freshman year of college, my family took a trip to visit my aunt in Italy. This was my first international trip, and I was excited to see the sights and experience the European way of life. Prior to our trip, my dad warned me that we would have to plan our trip to accommodate the afternoon siesta – an afternoon break that Italians and many Europeans take each afternoon during the workday. At first, I did not take his warning too seriously. Did all business really come to a halt for several hours each afternoon?

While out on a shopping trip one day in Sicily, I noticed one business after another putting up their “closed” signs. As my dad had warned, we had started shopping too close to the siesta and the businesses were closing until 4:00 p.m. Everything in the town literally shut down in the middle of the day. Obviously, this was a far cry from what happens in the United States—a place where retailers expect their workers to skip important holidays with their families and employers prefer their employees work while sick or on vacation rather than use their earned paid-time off.<sup>1</sup>

As we killed time walking around the city until the stores reopened, my dad said something that I will never forget. “Unlike back home, people here work in order to live not the other way around.” Translation? In the United States, people live to work. We are often expected to always be “on” when we enter the workforce, always reachable even when we are not at work.<sup>2</sup> This has only been made easier with email and video conferencing software.

*Vianca T. Malick is chair of the CBA Young Lawyers Section for the 2024-2025 bar year. She is an Assistant Attorney General in the Infrastructure and Economic Development Section of the Connecticut Office of the Attorney General where she primarily handles defensive litigation on behalf of several state agencies.*



Hearing my dad make this observation was somewhat surprising to me. My dad had worked a full-time corporate job and part-time retail job for as long as I could remember. Seeing my dad constantly working and missing important moments with our family, I vowed that once I joined the workforce, work would be just that – work, a means to live life. I would strive to strike the perfect balance between a successful career and a satisfying home life. I would prioritize “work/life balance.”

Unfortunately for younger me, I picked a profession that is still finding difficulty embracing the idea of work/life balance and requires those wishing to become lawyers to work tirelessly for years in order to get there. Like many of my colleagues, I participated in as many things as possible in high school and college. The semester I took the LSAT, I had a full 18 credit course semester, spent three nights a week at UConn Marching Band practice, woke up early on Saturdays to perform with the band at football games, and squeezed practicing for the LSAT on Sundays between my other coursework

and co-ed fraternity meetings. Law school was no different. In addition to my courses, I interned as much as possible, was a member of a journal, and served on the board of my law school’s public interest organization. Once barred, we are then expected to participate in our bar organizations, volunteer for municipal boards in our towns, and collaborate with non-legal professionals to expand our network and build our client base.

In the United States, the common belief is that we have to stretch ourselves thin and prioritize our jobs in spite of our personal lives in order to be successful in our careers.<sup>3</sup> However, in recent years, the world has seen what this can cause—constant stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, and just general unhappiness with one’s life.<sup>4</sup> Adequate paid time off, flexible hours, and the ability to work from home are becoming increasingly important considerations for those entering today’s workforce. Many are seeking a balance between work and life, with the ability to be successful without sacrificing time to do the things outside of work that they enjoy.

This growing need for work/life balance is causing a change in the work landscape around the globe. France has a mandatory thirty-five (35) hour work week and in 2017 was the first country to implement a “right to disconnect” law protecting employees from being required to respond to work communications outside of work hours.<sup>5</sup> Several other countries, including Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Italy, and Australia, have passed similar legislation.<sup>6</sup> Iceland has also embraced a shorter work week with no reduction in pay.<sup>7</sup>

I think the United States is far away from embracing drastic changes in our work environment, and many of us may even think wanting to unplug at the end of the workday makes us seem lazy or uncommitted to our work. However, this cannot be further from the truth. Working flexible hours and taking our vacation time allows us to recharge and give our best work to our employers.

I urge young lawyers at the start of their careers to determine what is important to them. If work/life balance is something you wish to achieve, communicate your expectations with your employers. As young lawyers, we may think that our lack of experience means lack of negotiation power as we enter the workforce, but we are the future of the profession and what is expected is changing. As we have children, we may not want to miss those important milestones for the work email that could wait until the next day. Wanting work/life balance does not mean we do not care about our careers or that we do not want to be successful. It just means that we don’t want to miss our children’s important milestones, memories with our friends and loved ones, or the opportunity to experience life to the fullest. ■

#### NOTES

- 1 Peter Weber, *France Aspires to Work by Working Less. Is it Working?*, THE WEEK US (Mar. 29, 2023), <https://theweek.com/>

in-depth/1022073/france-aspires-to-work-by-working-less-is-it-working.

- 2 Maura Thomas, *What Does Work-Life Balance Even Mean?*, FORBES (July 26, 2022, 04:09 PM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maurathomas/2022/07/26/what-does-work-life-balance-even-mean/>.
- 3 Peter Weber, *France Aspires to Work by Working Less. Is it Working?*, THE WEEK US (Mar. 29, 2023), <https://theweek.com/in-depth/1022073/france-aspires-to-work-by-working-less-is-it-working>.
- 4 Maura Thomas, *What Does Work-Life Balance Even Mean?*, FORBES (July 26, 2022, 04:09 PM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maurathomas/2022/07/26/what-does-work-life-balance-even-mean/>.
- 5 Lee Ying Shan, *You Have a Right to Ignore Your Bosses – But Only in These Countries, and After Work Hours*, CNBC, (last updated Aug. 27, 2024, 12:40 AM), <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/08/27/these-countries-grant-workers-the-right-to-ignore-bosses-after-work.html>.
- 6 *Id.*
- 7 Olesya Dmitracova, *Iceland Embraced a Shorter Work Week. Here’s How it Turned Out*, CNN (Oct. 25, 2024, 6:19 AM), <https://www.cnn.com/2024/10/25/business/iceland-shorter-working-week-economy/index.html>.



## Serving the Needs of the Connecticut Legal Community

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers – Connecticut, Inc. (LCL-CT) is a Connecticut non-profit corporation dedicated to providing information, support and assistance to Connecticut lawyers, judges, and law students in matters of substance use, mental health, stress, and wellness.

There is no cost. All contact is private, confidential, and anonymous and protected under C.G.S. §51-81d(a), as amended.

We offer access to confidential mental health resources, support groups and an array of links to information tailored for attorneys. Scan the QR Code on the right and see for yourself!

**FREE and CONFIDENTIAL Support for Connecticut Judges, Lawyers, and Law Students**  
Call Anytime | 860-497-1422

