

When Work/Life Goes Badass

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Two weeks after the COVID lockdown began, I was asked to write a piece about work/life balance for Harvard University's daily newspaper. But I dislike that term, so in the piece I pushed back against the concept, saying that balance isn't a static state that someone achieves. It's a constant recalibration. It's like standing on one foot, kind of shaky, maybe losing balance, then regaining it.

If you fall down, you get back up, and start again. That's not balance so much as it is *balancing* the specific demands of gravity, of our lives and of the human condition more generally.

A few months after the piece was published, I learned that it had been picked up outside of Harvard. I discovered one column about the importance of maintaining strength and balance to prevent falls in older adults. The author noted the physical and mental aspects of his own practice of martial arts, and the *art* of balancing.

He called out some of my ideas like the importance of a spirit of goodwill and generosity, placing them in the context of these troubling times of political division and social unrest.

I was happy to see a kindred spirit elaborate on my ideas. As it turned out, that kindred spirit was Chuck Norris, one of most famously badass celebrities in the U.S., quoting me, the *social worker*.

I immediately concluded that this made me a badass by association. Let me explain.

Francesca Gino – a professor at the Harvard Business School who co-taught a course called, “Anatomy of a Badass” – describes badass it in a number of ways including having the courage to bring your full self forward in the workplace. Which for me begs the question: *which* self?

Maybe, in order to be a work/life badass, we should begin by acknowledging our many different selves. Then consider how we can be bold in our choices to care for these “selves” at least as much as we do for others. And to privilege self-care unambivalently, unapologetically. So I propose the following “Badass Work/Life Self-Care Manifesto”:

- 1) We make a strenuous effort to put the contrasting aspects of ourselves together in a fluidly coherent way;
- 2) We commit to the effort of self-care as a heroic act of generosity to ourselves as well as to others who depend on us;
- 3) We're resolute in our refusal to berate ourselves for our human imperfections;

4) We find the courage to trust that a moral compass can guide us as we feel our way in the dark;

5) We persevere in the search to connect with something larger than ourselves, something larger *in* ourselves;

6) We do all of this in the context of community.

Why community? We know that healthy social connections are positively correlated with wellbeing, so us badass types should be asking: Where are the opportunities for connection? How do we recognize them when we find them – or they find us?

I'm now connected to a celebrity with a certain type of badass brand. Before his column, I would have asserted that we have little in common. But he reminded me that as long as we seek and recognize meaningful ways to build connection with others, *especially* those whom we see as different from ourselves (like my new bestie, Chuck), in the end, we may be losing and reclaiming our balance again and again in the dark, but that doesn't mean that we're lost – as long as we remember to care for ourselves just as we do for those we encounter along the way.