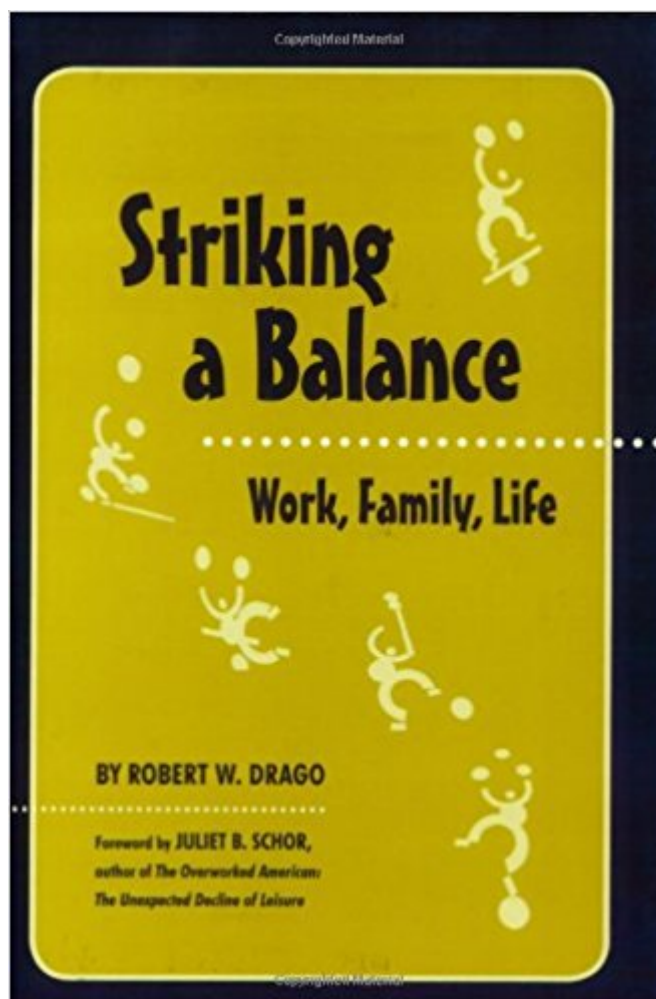


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Striking A Balance: Work, Family, Life



Synopsis

In this provocative book, economist and work/life expert Robert Drago constructs a unique vision of the meaning of balance, unmasking the real reasons most Americans lead unbalanced lives. Sifting through the vast body of relevant research from a range of academic disciplines, including new findings from the author's own studies, *Striking a Balance: Work, Family, Life* examines the deeply held but unexamined beliefs about work, womanhood, and society that are responsible for our out-of-balance lives. In his optimistic final chapter, Drago calls on us to challenge those beliefs, and provides a road map for change. If we take this path, he argues, we will not only improve our life balance, but also address the nearly one-fifth of our population who require but do not receive adequate care, the "new gender gap" between women who care for others and women who succeed in high-powered careers, and even the rise in income inequality. With a forward by Juliet B. Schor, author of *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*

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Customer Reviews

Bob Drago provides us with a powerful new framework to help solve the problem of imbalance in contemporary society--some people have too much work, many have too little income and not enough care-giving, and virtually everyone suffers from a lack of gender equality. To the work-life paradigm he adds the almost forgotten concept of leisure, with surprising results. His real-life solutions are inspiring, his policy prescriptions are simple, clear, and mercifully few. This book is an enjoyable, engaging read. Read it and change your life and the world. --Heidi Hartmann, Ph.D.,

President, Institute for Women's Policy Research

Framed in terms of the care gap, the new gender gap between mothers and others, and the widening income gap, this lively and accessible book makes it clear why so many of us find it difficult to strike a balance in our lives. It can be read with profit by students of labor economics, those concerned with women and work, or anyone who has ever had to juggle the demands of care and career. --Eileen Applebaum, Director, Center for Women and Work, and Professor, School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University

It is hard for American working parents to achieve balanced lives, but as Bob Drago argues in this important and timely book, we can change that. We know we have a crisis when, as his research shows, over half of the mothers who teach college chemistry and about 40 percent who teach English say that they returned to work sooner than they wanted after having a child because they wanted to be taken seriously as academics, and many of them felt forced to choose their work over their children. Rather than groaning about forced imbalance, however, Drago powerfully marshals the evidence and points to the models we need to create balance for both sexes. A must read for us all. --Arlie Russell Hochschild, author of *The Time Bind* and *The Commercialization of Intimate Life*

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Robert W. Drago is a Professor of Labor Studies and Women's Studies at Penn State University, and a Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne. The author of over 70 articles and 4 books, he helped to found takecarenet.org and the *workfam* newsgroup. He lives in State College, PA, has two wonderful daughters, and writes music in his spare time.

This book was not an eye opener. I don't see why Drago felt the need to write a painfully boring book about norms without bringing any new insight on the subject. I absolutely cannot stand authors that have to make the same point over and over on 100+ pages of their "work". Could've just written a 5 page essay on the issue and saved his readers the time and effort.

This excellent analysis of the current state of working and trying to live at the same time in America is a great wakeup call from the overwork hypnosis reigning for too long. Unlike in other advanced nations, we've never had a real national conversation about the impacts of large numbers of caregivers in the workplace and skyrocketing workweeks. Drago makes those repercussions of work without end very clear, in imploding families, skyrocketing health costs and absentee lives. Armed with a trove of research, he shows us not only the downside, but also a way out, when we can see the unconscious norms that skew our value system and sanity--the ideal worker norm, the motherhood norm, and the individualism norm. This much-needed book should should be required reading for every exec, congressperson, and presidential-candidate policy guru in the land.

One of my favorite books about families' work/life balance

Written by Robert W. Drago (Professor of Labor Studies and Women's Studies, Penn State University), *Striking a Balance: Work, Family, Life* is not a self-help book for the individual, but rather a scholarly examination of the modern societal problems of the care gap (too many children, elderly, and disabled, particularly among the poor, are not getting the care they need), the gender gap (women are forced to choose between success in their careers and providing adequate care to their children, or any other form of care work for low or no pay) and the income gap (the rich get richer and the poor get poorer). At the heart of these problems is not just cold hard economics, but also societal norms - the "motherhood norm" that insists women should provide care for little or no pay; the "ideal worker norm" that conditions employers to expect their workers to put in long hours up to an inhuman level; and the "individualism norm", a society-infused belief that the government should not help those needing care. *Striking a Balance* prescribes society-wide remedies to these growing problems: paid family leave, early childhood education and child care financing, guaranteed health insurance, and a minimum wage increase indexed to inflation, and the simple importance of allowing men and women from all walks of life to have their voices heard. Extensively researched, *Striking a Balance: Work Family Life* is a persuasive academic treatise about the need for social

change, and highly recommended for reading for not only college library shelves, but also anyone looking for a better understanding of why the government needs to pay more attention to minimum wage, health care, and paid family leave issues.

Bob Drago offers a provocative, analytical, yet lively read, which should appeal across several audiences. *Striking a Balance* achieves its own careful balance of academic research, practical work-life strategies for employers and communities, public policy advocacy and personal reflection. It systematically lays out the underlying source of our persistent work-life conflict--the inherent incompatibility between three dominant norms in the US--being an ideal worker, being an ideal mother (parent) and being a self-sufficient individualist without need for public supports. Our lack of commitment, from the single employer-employee relationship level to the whole nation, to help workers and working families successfully facilitate all their roles and responsibilities, has opened three "gaps." The first is the "care gap," where half of those needing care in the US are not receiving it sufficiently. The second is the "gender gap," which here is less about the differences between men and women's than about the differential earnings of mothers who engage in professional-managerial careers vis-à-vis those who provide direct care to their own children or relatives as unpaid work (or as underpaid employees). These gaps will persist as long as those three norms prevail. The ideal worker norm, internalized particularly among professionals and managers--that career success requires total commitment of time, energy, self-identity toward work--has been increasingly reinforced by high rewards to its display, the "income gap." Households now face constraints not only of time and money, but institutional obstacles quite far outside their direct control, some of which may be subtle and even sub-conscious. But imbalance is more than personal, it is social. Thus, the potential solutions are workplace by workplace, occupation by occupation, state by state and even grander in scale. Drago focuses on a few, although they do get us only so far, such as reduced hours options for professionals (including academics), community-based coalitions of constituencies to provide or subsidize child care services, California's successful employee-payroll-funded paid leave policy. The success stories all have in common a strategy of adopting more "inclusive processes," a nascent norm of employee involvement, but a more holistic view of workers. Drago draws on many smaller scale successes as a cause for optimism about closing the gaps at the national level. While being practically useful, Drago's contribution is more than another "how-to" or "self-help" book. His sights are set at addressing the sources of our ailments, not just the symptoms, and a future of greater balanced lives for the greatest number.

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