

Negotiating Work–Life Balance When Everyone is Home



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Roadmap

- 1) What is negotiation?
- 2) Strategies to help negotiate the new work-life balance
- 3) Understanding your own needs
- 4) Understanding the needs of those around you
- 5) Dealing with the “Big Two” emotions
- 6) Framing your negotiations
- 7) Negotiating with children
- 8) Negotiating with your employer

Work-Life Challenges When Everyone is Home

- You and your partner are **both working full-time**, but you seem to be responsible for most of the **housework** and **homeschooling**. How do you negotiate a better arrangement?
- Your home has a **small home office** that only one person can use at a time. With everyone working or attending school from home, how can you negotiate for **work space**?
- You work in a **client-facing industry**, and one of your clients is demanding. Something went wrong, and they want an **emergency meeting ASAP**. It's 9AM and your spouse is getting on a conference call that will last for the next 4 hours. Your two year-old refuses to eat breakfast--instead, he is screaming and throwing food. What do you do?
- You're a **manager** trying to get your department's work back on track after the disruption, but you sense **burnout from your team** when you issue requests. How do you handle this?

What is Negotiation?

- Any conversation in which you are steering a relationship
 - Relationships with your managers or coworkers
 - Relationships with family members, partners, roommates
 - Relationship with yourself





Strategies

- Ask the Right Questions
 - Ask open-ended questions, of yourself and others
- Active Listening
 - Non-verbal: Stop talking, make eye contact, think about facial expression
 - Verbal: Clarify, acknowledge what is being said
- Summarize and Acknowledge
 - Give others a sense that their thoughts are being acknowledged and heard
- Frame your asks in a productive way

Asking the Right Questions

What does asking ourselves questions have to do with negotiation?

A lot. Research finds a definite link between self-awareness and negotiation proficiency. Asking the right questions helps us cultivate self-awareness and knowledge.

How does asking other people questions help me negotiate better?

Asking open questions helps us get the information we need to craft better deals.



[Ask for More: Ten Questions to Negotiate Anything,](#)
by Alexandra Carter

Ask the Right Questions

Mirror:

What's the problem I want to solve?

What do I need?

What do I feel?

Window:

Tell me...

What do you need?

What are your concerns?



Mirror: What Do I Need?

- Understanding needs:
 - Basic physical needs (i.e. food, sleep)
 - Safety & security needs (i.e. financial/job security)
 - Psychological needs (i.e. respect, recognition, love)
- Ask yourself, “What do I need?” Take 5-10 minutes to write down the answer.
- Tangibles & intangibles → concretize the intangibles to make them actionable
 - “What would that look like?”



[Ask for More: Ten Questions to Negotiate Anything](#), by Alexandra Carter

Wearing Different Hats

How do we make sure we have accounted for what we need in all of our different “hats” or roles? Think about your (1) responsibilities; (2) identities; and (3) roles, formal or informal.

Parent

Keep everyone healthy & safe

Make time to help with homeschool

Establish routines, sense of normalcy

Spouse/Partner/Roommate

Share household duties in fair way

Work peacefully in shared space

Feel like we are on the same team

Accommodations for illness

Employer/Employee

More flexibility in hours

Technological help/guidance

Maintain connection with coworkers

Window: What Do They Need?

- Asking someone what they need helps you negotiate better.
- **Timing is important.** Choose the timing of your negotiation carefully, and give the person time to prepare. Once you start, assess whether you need to take a time out or reconvene later.
- Assess (if possible) whether the person is likely to fight, flee or freeze.
- Make the needs concrete, by asking, “What would that look like?”
- Avoid asking “why” questions. Instead ask “What” or “How” questions.
 - i.e. instead of “Why do you need that?” try “What makes that important?”

[Ask for More: Ten Questions to Negotiate Anything](https://www.amazon.com/Ask-More-Questions-Negotiate-Anything/dp/1982130482), by Alexandra Carter

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Role of Emotions in Work-Life Negotiations

- Especially in uncertain times, we will see a rise in anger/irritability/frustration (in others and in ourselves).
- Anger/irritation/frustration in negotiation are often “cover emotions.” What do they cover for?
- The “Big Two” unexpressed emotions: fear and guilt.

Ask for More: Ten Questions to Negotiate Anything, by Alexandra Carter

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Role of Emotions: Naming the “Big Two”

- Fear: “What will happen to our business? What will happen to me? My family? Our finances? Our health?”
- Guilt: “Why didn’t I prepare more for this?” “What if I’m not providing an adequate environment for my child?” “I shouldn’t complain about anything, I’m lucky to even have a job.”
- Appear in family as well as business negotiations, but often are not expressed. When you see the big two, try (1) reassurance, (2) focusing the conversation on the problem to be solved and (3) giving options.

Acknowledgment

- In times of stress, we often neglect to acknowledge what someone is going through, or what is going right.
- When you encounter strong emotions or unproductive behavior, try acknowledgment.
- Thanking someone for a contribution, or acknowledging their emotions greatly helps them listen to what you have to say.



[Ask for More: Ten Questions to Negotiate Anything,](#)
Alexandra Carter

Framing: The “I-We” Framework

Frame your ask in a way that shows the other party also benefits.

The “I-We” Framework helps you highlight:

- Common interests
- Opportunities for gain rather than loss



At Home

If I isolate myself when I feel sick, we as a family will be less likely to become collectively ill.

When I exercise to relieve my stress, we all benefit from my greater resilience and energy around the house.

At Work

If I receive this training, we as an organization will benefit from my greater expertise and ability to communicate and help my colleagues.

When I take time off from work to combat symptoms of burnout, we as a company benefit from my greater productivity and appreciation for my colleagues.

Negotiating with Children

- Use this language: Mom/dad is “open” (available) or “closed” (not available). This provides a clear way to explain your status. Explain this language beforehand and make a game out of it while they practice using it. You can also help them color a red light and green light to help them visualize.
- Keep a small basket of toys or a special notebook with pens in your desk. Allow your child access only when they are waiting for you.
- Hang a large paper and attach a pencil to the wall next to it. Allow children to write their name and what they need, or make a mark representing their need. This helps them feel heard.

Negotiating with Your Employer: Strategies

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- Find allies, at your level or above
 - Advocate for systems or policy instead of individual manager discretion. For example:
 - Where possible, institute a policy that employees set hours according to their needs
 - If people need to be “on” at certain times, advocate for a system whereby people collaborate and take shifts according to their needs and client work
 - Time off for lunch, other meals, or during the morning hour when parents set their child up to homeschool
 - Limits on call length
 - Time for “deep work” without interruptions
 - For client-facing businesses, be quick in your return communication even if you cannot make an immediate meeting. For example, if you receive an 8am request for a 9am emergency meeting that you cannot make, respond immediately with options that work.

Avoiding Conversational Apologies

Women often apologize in order to make themselves relatable to someone else - or to get them to apologize.

Example: You've told a colleague you are not free between 10am-noon due to family concerns. They schedule a call at 11am.

- Before: "I'm so sorry, I can't make it. My schedule is crazy these days."
- After: "As I mentioned, I'm not available then. I think it will help if we're both on the call. I can do 2pm - what works for you? Thanks for your help."



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