


# Money Mic: ‘I Conquered Work-Life Balance—By Hacking My Weekends’

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Posted on Aug 29, 2014

## Weekend Warrior: My Love-Hate Relationship With Work-Life Balance

Since the day my 4-year-old son was born, I’ve been a self-employed mom. So while he’s at preschool during the week, I work from my home office. But since I typically pick him up by 11:30 A.M., he ends up spending a lot of time with me—making it difficult to run errands or finish all of my assignments.

On the weekends, my husband and I share parenting responsibilities, so I have a little more downtime than usual—and until recently, I invariably spent this time running in circles, trying to squeeze in too much at once.

Here’s what a typical Saturday morning looked like: As soon as my husband and son left the house for a playground excursion, I’d throw a load of laundry in the wash and unload the dishwasher. In the middle of those tasks, I’d remember another to-do, like running vinegar through the coffee pot for a cleaning.

Realizing it was getting late in the morning, I’d suddenly feel a sense of urgency to start my yoga practice before they returned. But about 20 minutes into yoga, the load of laundry I’d started was ready for the dryer, so I’d hit the pause button on yoga to change over the laundry—but not before checking work email on my smartphone, rendering it nearly impossible to recapture my yoga focus.

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Before I knew it, my husband and son were home—and my only real accomplishment was making myself as frazzled as humanly possible. I’d try to wind down by going to dinner or a movie in the evening, but the whole time I’d be nagged by a chorus of “shoulds”: *I shouldn’t be eating at this fancy restaurant. I should be folding that laundry. I shouldn’t be thinking about laundry.*

Enough was enough. I needed to figure out a better way to spend my weekends—to enjoy them again, tackle my to-do list and sneak in some relaxation. So I decided to do some reconnaissance, turning to time-management pros for advice.

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## The Secret to Taking Charge of Your Time Off

According to Laura Vanderkam, author of [“What the Most Successful People Do on the Weekend,”](#) the key to making the most of your Saturdays and Sundays is as simple as changing your perspective on planning. Many people think that “free time” automatically implies a lack of structure—or the freedom to forgo plans altogether—but that’s where they’re wrong.

The truth is that, whether or not you’ve penciled in an event on your calendar, you’ll still end up doing *something*. “And if you haven’t thought about what that ‘something’ should be, it probably won’t wind up being as meaningful or enjoyable as it could be,” Vanderkam says, adding that even a small amount of planning can have a big impact on your weekend—and even your wallet.

Take, for example, the simple act of dining out on a Saturday night. “If you plan ahead, you might score a reservation at that hot—but cheap!—Thai place,” she says. “But if you don’t plan ahead, you’ll show up, they’ll have a two-hour wait and you’ll go someplace more expensive that you won’t enjoy as much.”

But even before you can start focusing on those weekend plans, it’s important to first set up a schedule for the following workweek. So before you leave the office on Friday, Vanderkam suggests writing down everything you need to do when you return on Monday.

This way, instead of fixating on your to-do list over the weekend, you’ll actually be present while spending time with friends and family. “It enables you to show up Monday ready to go,” Vanderkam says. “You’ll have a more productive week.”

Once you’ve drafted your Monday to-dos, it’s time to strategize your Saturday and Sunday plans. In her book, Vanderkam shares the story of a couple who learned to embrace planning by making it fun: On Friday evenings they sit down with their happy-hour drinks and list what they’d like to accomplish over the next two days. It’s a simple—but effective—way to marry planning and quality time with your partner.