

Part 2: Reading comprehension

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK: WHY SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS NEED TO REGAIN A SENSE OF BALANCE

If we are honest, most of us could use a little more balance at some points in our busy lives. Getting the right mix between work and leisure time can have benefits for our physical and mental health. It can also improve the performance of a business, research has suggested. The pandemic saw the biggest change in working patterns for decades, perhaps centuries. There was a **surge** in home working and flexible, “hybrid” working, blending work in the office with remote work. But despite this increased flexibility, work-life balance is far from standard. This is especially true among small business owners, who often feel **compelled** to check emails outside traditional work hours or work over the weekend.

Given the fact that small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) account for 99 % of all UK businesses, that’s a lot of people who aren’t switching off when perhaps they should. However, there is some encouraging news here. According to a recent survey of UK small business leaders by American Express, there is certainly a widespread understanding of the importance of work-life balance and a desire to improve it. The research is based on responses from 500 business leaders in companies with fewer than 50 employees. Eight in 10 of the executives agree that regular time off from work is important to their wellbeing. However, there is often a gap between intention and action, the research found. Almost half of those surveyed admit to feeling guilty about not spending enough time with family or friends. And one-third say that they stopped their hobbies altogether when they started running their own business. While small business owners recognise the importance of frequent breaks in improving their work-life balance and the success of their business, many of them **struggle** to find room for **downtime**.

Someone who is well aware of this pressure is Michelle Ovens, director of Small Business Saturday UK, a campaign to celebrate small business success and encourage consumers to “shop local” to support businesses in their communities. People often start a business because they want more freedom and flexibility, she says, but that freedom can be reduced by them trying to do everything in the business and running out of time in the day and gas in the tank.

There’s no one-size-fits-all approach to a good work-life blend. Some may need to spend more time supporting elderly parents or young children, for example. Others may want more time for hobbies. There are also benefits for the business itself. The American Express survey found that almost eight in 10 respondents agree that regular breaks are important to being a good leader and more than half think they and their business would benefit from them spending more time away from the workplace. Time away, especially travelling abroad or getting a change of scenery, can even offer new and different perspectives that entrepreneurs can bring back to their businesses. Tips for improving your work-life balance? Set firm boundaries between work and leisure time; for yourself, colleagues, **suppliers** and customers. Also, book time off work to recharge your batteries and reduce the risk of “burnout”.

Ultimately, however, what constitutes the right work-life balance will vary over time and be different for each small business owner. There isn’t a magic formula and therefore we shouldn’t be too hard on ourselves if our messy lives fall short of our ideals. Balance in life is a constant work in progress. It might mean work sometimes; sometimes it might mean sport, or family, or community, or rest. The key thing is to give yourself a break—we are all a work in progress here.

Text adapted from an article by
Nick HUBER. *The Guardian* [online] (September 19, 2023)

surge: augment / aumento

compelled: obligat / obligado

struggle: lluitar, esforçar-se / luchar, esforzarse

downtime: temps per a desconnectar / tiempo para desconectar

supplier: proveïdor / proveedor

QUESTIONS

Answer the questions below using complete sentences. You may use fragments from the text unless specified not to do so.

[3 points: 0.5 points for each correct answer. Up to 0.3 points might be deducted from the total mark for lack of intelligibility in the answers provided.]

1. Using information from the first paragraph, complete the following sentence IN YOUR OWN WORDS. You can keep the word *business*.

Balancing work and leisure time...

2. Why does the author say there is a gap between intention and action?
3. What seems to be the paradox in setting up one's own business?
4. Find a sentence in the text that means the following: "Everyone has their own way of finding how to balance work and personal life."
5. How can businesses benefit from leaders spending time away from work?
6. Explain the message in the last paragraph of the article IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
Deduction for lack of intelligibility (up to 0.3 points)	
Reading comprehension score	