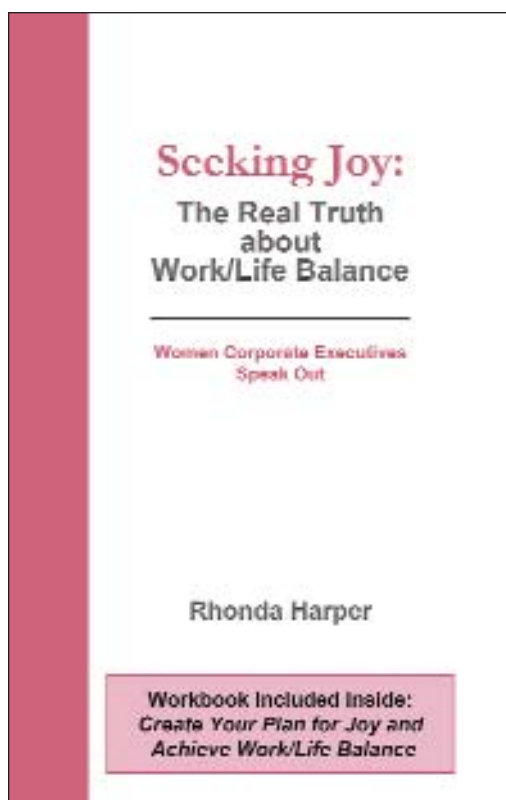


# BOOKS



## Insightful, But Rushed, Advice



### Seeking Joy: The Real Truth About Work/Life Balance

By Rhonda Harper  
Reviewed by Cass Wright

My first impression of *Seeking Joy* was that it looked similar to a women's studies 101 textbook. The cover invokes little or none of the excitement and joy that the book proclaims to be about. Consequently, I wasn't sure if this women's guide to work and life balance was for me.

Rhonda Harper's book, conceived on October 21, 2003, in response to a request that she speak at an executive women's conference, was sent to the publisher eight days later so that it could be shipped by the November 15 conference date. Unfortunately, that isn't hard to believe; there were too many distract-

ing typographical and grammatical errors to go unnoticed. Harper does acknowledge those problems, blaming the quick process from conception to print, but decided to sell the book to the public regardless. But because of its lack of thorough editing, the book is difficult to follow and definitely not as effective in its delivery as it could be.

Despite its rough quality, I decided to give the book a second chance after reading the third section, "Plan for Joy." This section is solely devoted to readers, enabling them to examine their lives by asking such intuitive and thought-provoking questions as, What do I think

balance would look like for me, right now? That probe forced me to look closely at the way I live my life, and made me wonder why I never seriously looked before into how I balance my work and play. Until I read this book, I didn't realize that some of my daily anxieties, such as not spending enough time exercising, stem from a discrepancy between the time and energy that I devote to work and life. When I began to write the answers to the questions, I found myself filling the space with the things I'm not accomplishing each day. I quickly realized how useful this planning tool would be in helping me to balance my career and home life.

*Seeking Joy* is well structured, beginning with an introduction, and then four chapters, each devoted to a step in the balancing process. The first chapter, "Get to What's Real," deals directly with the challenges women face each day while trying to juggle a home life and a successful career. Harper discusses such issues as the inherent need many women feel to be a stereotypical mom as well as a breadwinner, and how those problems differ from the challenges men face. She briefly (too briefly to be trustworthy) covers scientific differences between genders, such as male and female brain sizes, but adds that researchers don't know what effect those differences have on brain function.

Harper also glances over an affliction known as Dual Income, No Sex (DINS) by quickly describing how sexual relationships can suffer from the lack of a work-and-personal-life balance.

I wasn't impressed with the sweeping generalizations Harper makes throughout the book, particularly the first chapter's detailing of women's roles during the past five decades. Although useful in setting up her ultimate point—that women are different from men but no less important—each decade's description consists of maybe two sentences. That's hardly enough to effectively illustrate women's roles during those years.

The second chapter is a collection of testimonials from 31 female executives in various roles and companies, ranging from Coca-Cola to Southwest Airlines to The Home Depot. Each woman details ways that her personal life is affected by the imbalance. Some of the women speak out about how they don't want to admit to, or feel that they shouldn't be having, problems balancing their careers and personal lives. Others describe why they feel that they overcompensate in one area or another. Harper does successfully go to great lengths to illustrate the difficulties women have trying to achieve a balanced life. Her sources are articulate, and they clearly experience many of the same issues.

After the workbook-type third chapter, "Plan for Joy," Harper gives a few pages (complete with inspirational quotations) for readers to record their progress. She calls this chapter "Experience Joy." She concludes the book with a summary and offers a few last words of encouragement, namely that no one has these issues completely figured out.

Harper's ideas are insightful and laid out well. Although many researchers think that women suffer more than men from life and work imbalance, it's unfortunate that the idea of balance isn't addressed as one that both men and women should be working toward.

All in all, I think *Seeking Joy* deserves two cups of coffee.

**Editor's Note:** A revised edition of *Seeking Joy* was recently released.

*Seeking Joy: The Real Truth About Work/Life Balance*, by Rhonda Harper. Global Book Publishing: Charleston, South Carolina. 195 pp. US\$12.99

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## If This, Then....

If you're struggling to maintain a successful career and a meaningful personal life, these spring releases might provide inspiration.

### **Just Enough: Tools for Creating Success in Your Work and Life**

By Laura Nash and Howard Stevenson

(Wiley Books, March 2004, US\$24.95)

At one time success was defined by a big paycheck. But now, many achievers are "looking to build something of lasting value" in our unstable world.

Like many career advice books, the research for *Just Enough* began shortly after the events of 9/11, as many Americans began to reevaluate their personal and professional lives. What the authors found wasn't an inability for people "to imagine the 'good life' in terms larger than money, but knowing how to go after it."

Based on numerous interviews, case studies, and surveys, the book is focused around a core message: Success isn't about a single thing or an infinite number of things; it's about finding "just enough." Moreover, success in all aspects of life can be measured in these categories: achievement, happiness, significance, and legacy. Nash and Stevenson provide readers with a clear strategy for addressing goals in each category without shortchanging their dreams.

### **The Time Divide: Work, Family, and Gender Inequality**

By Jerry A. Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson (Harvard University Press, May 2004, \$29.95)

This sociological study, due out in May, explains why and how time pressures have emerged and what we can do to improve them. The authors argue that not everyone is overworked. In fact, they detail how time inequality has become a dividing point among Americans—between the overworked and the underemployed, women and men, parents and nonparents. They conclude that the U.S. economic system fails to support the needs of two-income families and single parents by increasing the amount of high-demanding jobs.