



# THE PROFESSIONAL AND THE PERSONAL

The so-called ‘work-life balance’ is familiar to almost all of us. But work is part of life, and can take over as our focus moves from home and family. **Captain Nick Carpenter** reflects on this familiar shift.

Japan is an interesting country and it recently experienced a once-in-a-generation change; Emperor Akihito abdicated from the Chrysanthemum Throne and his son Crown Prince Naruhito ascended to it. This brought a ten-day public holiday, unprecedented in Japan where most workers only take 10 days annual leave in a whole year (The Times, 29 April 2019). There is a conflict in Japan between the goal of being seen as a good worker and the personal desire to take time off while colleagues remain at work. So ingrained is this need to be seen at work that the government recently passed a law to cap overtime at 100 hours per month in an effort to reduce ‘karoshi’ – cases of employees working themselves to death.

For most of us, the idea of death from overwork is almost impossible to conceive, and yet in Japan, societal demands trump personal ones. But this is not a purely Japanese problem, it is a daily battle in line flying. The rules say that we must only operate for a restricted number of hours while operations ask us to exceed those hours. Having exceeded the hours before and not suffered negative consequences, our delusion of invulnerability is bolstered. This encourages us to accept the request to exceed the limitation.

This conflict can also be expressed in more subtle ways. Most airlines are keen to maintain their on-time performance and, in order to make this a collaborative effort across departments, details of connecting

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passengers are inserted into the flight plan. As a result, at briefing, when pilots are considering the meteorological impacts on their flight, the 40 pages of Notices to Airmen, the restricted fuel load, and whether they will be at a legal mass to land, they discover that there are also 75 passengers who have tight connecting times at the destination. The unwritten, but clear implication of a delay is that these 75 passengers will be severely inconvenienced. These conflicts between production and protection are well known and, in the main, do not adversely affect operations.

A more interesting, and less often discussed trade-off is one that we make daily, between work and family.

So obsessed are we with the need to earn money to pay for our houses and cars that we lose sight of the fact that there is a significant part of our life that suffers as a result: our family and friends, relationships that are central to our ability to function as human beings.

Interested in peer assistance, I find myself drawn to the thoughts of Aristotle. He claimed that there are three modes of persuasion; *Logos*, *Ethos* and *Pathos*. *Logos* is the logical part that makes us rationalise how important work is to build funds for our family’s future. *Ethos* is how we understand ourselves, our values and credibility as a reliable worker. But, Aristotle claimed, the road to *Logos* is through *Pathos* or emotion. The word ‘empathy’ is derived from *pathos* and something that, it could be argued, is increasingly missing in our workplaces.

Emotion drives most of what we do, be it love, pride or anger, and yet, as modern workers in organisations we try to suppress it. It is hard to identify the competing emotions that drive us especially when they are disguised by the products of our professional lives. The cars that we drive and the houses that we live in and our

glowing employee reports symbolise professional success, and yet our relationships may be withering on the vine. As pilots, air traffic controllers, and other professionals, we are caught in a world where our emotional need for recognition at work is met by company rewards and incentives. Our focus can subtly shift away from our home and family until work becomes the centre of our world.

For many of us, the need to look after our family is met by the money that we earn. But this only meets basic needs for food, housing, and security. Unfortunately, work fills our days, and

fogs our judgement and values. When combined, it is easy to become goal-conflicted. We need that promotion, so we must work harder. When family asks for more of our time, we consider them unreasonable because of how hard we are working, and so begins a vicious cycle of longer days and more distraction as we sow the seeds for a financially secure future.

As a very bad gardener, I struggle to identify weeds from flowers, and this is the problem with 'the professional and the personal': sometimes the weeds can strangle the flowers that we want to cultivate for our wellbeing. **S**



Nick Carpenter is a military trained and commercially experienced airline pilot flying widebody aeroplanes in Asia. His interest in flight safety has inspired him to study for both Bachelor's and a Master's degrees in Psychology. In addition to flying, Nick is the operations manager at the Aviation Safety Institute in Australia.

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