



# I Know How She Does It: How Successful Women Make the Most of Their Time

By Laura Vanderkam



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**Everyone has an opinion, anecdote, or horror story about women and work. Now the acclaimed author of *What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast* shows how real working women with families are actually making the most of their time.**

“Having it all” has become the subject of countless books, articles, debates, and social media commentary, with passions running high in all directions. Many now believe this to be gospel truth: Any woman who wants to advance in a challenging career has to make huge sacrifices. She’s unlikely to have a happy marriage, quality time with her kids (assuming she can have kids at all), a social life, hobbies, or even a decent night’s sleep.

But what if balancing work and family is actually *not* as hard as it’s made out to be? What if all those tragic anecdotes ignore the women who quietly but consistently do just fine with the juggle?

Instead of relying on scattered stories, time management expert Laura Vanderkam set out to add hard data to the debate. She collected hour-by-hour time logs from 1,001 days in the lives of women who make at least \$100,000 a year. And she found some surprising patterns in how these women spend the 168 hours that every one of us has each week.

Overall, these women worked less and slept more than they assumed they did before they started tracking their time. They went jogging or to the gym, played with their children, scheduled date nights with their significant others, and had lunches with friends. They made time for the things that gave them pleasure and meaning, fitting the pieces together like tiles in a mosaic—without adhering to overly rigid schedules that would eliminate flexibility and spontaneity.

Vanderkam shares specific strategies that her subjects use to make time for the things that really matter to them. For instance, they . . .

\* Work split shifts (such as seven hours at work, four off, then another two at night from home). This allows them to see their kids without falling behind professionally.

- \* Get creative about what counts as quality family time. Breakfasts together and morning story time count as much as daily family dinners, and they're often easier to manage.
- \* Take it easy on the housework. You can free up a lot of time by embracing the philosophy of "good enough" and getting help from other members of your household (or a cleaning service).
- \* Guard their leisure time. Full weekend getaways may be rare, but many satisfying hobbies can be done in small bursts of time. An hour of crafting feels better than an hour of reality TV.

With examples from hundreds of real women, Vanderkam proves that you don't have to give up on the things you really want. *I Know How She Does It* will inspire you to build a life that works, one hour at a time.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"I'm a longtime fan of Laura Vanderkam's insightful work--her recommendations for getting the most out of every day are often counterintuitive but always realistic and manageable. In her new book, she reveals the time management strategies that highly successful mothers use to build lives that work. Thanks to her findings, I'll never look at my weekly calendar the same way again."

--**GRETCHEN RUBIN**, author of *Better Than Before* and *The Happiness Project*

"For many years I've wanted to see reflected in our collective conversation what I know to be true in women's lives: that many of us are happily combining work and motherhood, and loving both. Laura Vanderkam has written the book that's been sorely missing, and she does so with an impassioned, eloquent voice, important new research, and the warmth of a dear friend."

--**TARA MOHR**, author of *Playing Big*

"This book could have been titled *How to Be a Superhero*, because that's how it makes you feel and act after reading it. Vanderkam's curiosity for high performance and what makes it possible is infectious. Packed with research from real lives and tips for real change, this book is sure to help women around the world discover their own path to success."

--**JON ACUFF**, author of *Do Over*

"An empowering guide for professionals who want to figure out how to become superstars in their fields while building satisfying lives."

--**DORIE CLARK**, author of *Reinventing You* and *Stand Out*

#### About the Author

Laura Vanderkam questions the status quo and helps her readers rediscover their true passions and beliefs in pursuit of more meaningful lives.

Laura Vanderkam is the author of the forthcoming book *I Know How She Does It: How Successful Women Build Lives That Work* (Portfolio, June 9, 2015). Based on a time diary study of 1001 days in the lives of professional women and their families, this book takes a practical approach to the question of how people combine work and family while enjoying their own sweet time too.

Laura is also the author of *What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast* (Portfolio, 2013), *168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think* (Portfolio, 2010), and *All the Money in the World: What the Happiest People Know About Wealth* (Portfolio, 2012). She is also the author of a novel, *The Cortlandt Boys*, available as an ebook.

Laura is a frequent contributor to Fast Company's website and a member of USA Today's Board of Contributors. Her work has appeared in numerous publications including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Reader's Digest*, *City Journal*, *Fortune*, and *Prevention*.

She has appeared on numerous television programs, including *The Today Show* and *Fox & Friends*, hundreds of radio segments, and has spoken about time, money, and productivity to audiences of all sizes, including graduating seniors at her high school, the Indiana Academy, who brought her back as a

commencement speaker in 2006.

A 2001 graduate of Princeton, Laura enjoys running and singing and serves as the president of the board of trustees for the Young New Yorkers' Chorus. She lives outside Philadelphia with her husband and four children. She blogs daily at [LauraVanderkam.com](http://LauraVanderkam.com)

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## Introduction

“Remember the berry season is short.”

I came across this poignant thought the other day in the most pedestrian of places: on the basket our local pick-your-own strawberry farm gives visitors before they hit the fields. I was there on a sunny June day with my seven-year-old, Jasper, and four-year-old, Sam. My husband, Michael, had taken our two-year-old daughter, Ruth, fishing at a nearby pond. I was woozy on the hay ride to the fields, from the heat and the bumps on the rutted road, and also from what was then still a new secret: another baby on the way, joining the crew when all this hilly green in southeastern Pennsylvania would be covered with snow. As I fought back my dizziness, I stared at the found poetry on this empty box: “Remember the berry season is short. This box holds approximately 10 lbs level full, 15 lbs heaping full.”

It is a metaphor for life, perhaps, in that everything is a metaphor for life. The berry season is short. So how full, exactly, do I intend to fill the box? Or, if we slice away the metaphor, we could just ask this: what does the good life look like for me?

I think about this question frequently, writing in the genre I do. While self-help gets a reputation for flimsiness, at its best it takes a practical look at this eternal question, with a bonus not all philosophers offer: ideas and strategies for figuring it out.

I write about the good life through the lens of time, because a life is lived in hours. What you do with your life will be a function of how you spend the 8,760 hours that make a year, the 700,000 or so that make a life: at strawberry farms, rocking toddlers to sleep, and pursuing work that alters at least some corner of the universe.

The good news for those often told to limit their aspirations is that the box will hold all these things. It can hold all these things and more.

This book is about how real people have created full lives. It is about how you can borrow from their discoveries to do so too. It is about how you can move around and rethink the hours of your weeks to nurture your career, your relationships, and yourself, and still enjoy more open space than most people think is possible. It is, in short, about how to enjoy and make the most of your time, by which I mean investing as much as you wish in everything that matters: work, family, community, leisure. It is about celebrating abundance rather than lamenting choices or claiming that no one can have it all.

I find the subject of how we spend our time fascinating. I approach time management as a journalist, studying data sets and interviewing successful people about how they use their hours. In my previous books (*168 Hours* and *What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast*), I've tried to share these discoveries and tips for making readers' lives work. But as I wrote these books, I realized two things. First, I was most drawn to the stories and strategies of women like me, who were building careers and families at the same

time. Second, for all I probed my subjects to describe their lives, I was mostly relying on their anecdotes and storytelling. I wanted to see people's schedules in all their messy glory. I wanted to look at their time logs and see the curious places the data led. That's why I wrote this book, adding a researcher hat to my journalist one, trying to understand what 1,001 days in the lives of professional women and their families really look like.

There is much to learn from seeing how people use their hours to achieve their goals. Learning their strategies can be empowering; it reminds us that we have the power to shape our lives too. Years ago, when I filled out my first 168-hour (one week) time log, I thought that it seemed strange to view life as cells on a spreadsheet. But over time I came to see that I could view myself as the artist deciding on those cells. I became a mosaic maker, carefully placing tiles. By thinking about the arrangement, and watching others, and trying different strategies, over time I could create an intricate and satisfying pattern. I could create a mosaic that embraced new things: new opportunities in my working life, the new children whose lives I've loved watching unfold. Sometimes the larger world delights in telling people that a full life will be harried, leading one to being maxed out, or torn. But while it is the rare artist who can create a perfectly blissful mosaic, focusing only on the stressful moments ignores the other sweet moments, like making strawberry shortcakes with those bright red berries, and getting a note from someone who tells you your book has changed her life.

Life is simultaneously complex and compelling. It is stressful and it is wonderful. But if you believe, like I do, that the good life can be a full life—a level full life or even a heaping full life—then I invite you to study how you place the tiles of your time, energy, and attention. I invite you to think about the pattern with the goal, over time, of making an even more satisfying picture.

After all, the berry season is short. I believe in filling it with all the joy that is possible.

## CHAPTER 1

### The Mosaic

Life is not lived solely in stories. Yet this is the way we talk about our lives: in moments that must impart a lesson. Consequently, in much of the literature on work and life, our tale would begin with a Recitation of Dark Moments: a snowstorm threatening to maroon me in Los Angeles while my husband is in Europe and my three young children are with a sitter in Pennsylvania who wasn't planning on keeping them for several snowy days straight. Or, perhaps, I am in New York City overnight in order to be on a morning show at dawn. I am trying to turn in early when my husband calls to report that, after taking the kids to the circus, he's realized they're locked out of our new house. He's in problem-solving mode, calling me to get the numbers of people with a spare key, and when they don't pick up the phone, letting me know that the locksmith will be there in two hours. I shouldn't worry. They have adequate bottles! But of course the net result is that I am pacing around my hotel room, picturing my five-month-old baby out in the car in the middle of the cold night. How am I supposed to sleep after that?

I could begin with such tales, and then lament the craziness of modern life, and the impossibility of having it all. Ever since *The Atlantic* put Anne-Marie Slaughter's manifesto on this topic on the cover, and scored millions of reads, it's a truth in media circles that the phrase "can't have it all" lures women in. Tales that let us be voyeurs to such foibles draw clicks. People hunt for more extreme examples. An editor seeking submissions for a book of such stories suggested, as an example of what she wanted, "getting a text message from a sick child while flying an F-16 over Afghanistan." In 2012, the legal world posted reams of comments in response to a widely circulated departure memo from a Clifford Chance associate with two young children. In it, she chronicled an awful day, describing middle-of-the-night wake-ups from the kids, a

colleague who sat on a note until day care was closing, a bad commute, a not-exactly-helpful husband, and a long to-do list waiting for her after she wrestled the kids into bed. “Needless to say, I have not been able to simultaneously meet the demands of career and family,” she wrote her colleagues, and so the only choice available, the choice we all seem to understand, was to quit.

But in this book, I want to tell a different story. The key to this is realizing that life *isn't* lived in epiphanies, and that looking for lessons and the necessity of big life changes in dark moments profoundly limits our lives.

I came to see this not in an aha moment but in an accumulation of conversations that convinced me that my research into time use might be giving me insights that the larger world was missing. As one example, in summer 2013, I talked with a young woman who'd formerly worked at a consulting firm. She was thinking of starting a coaching company that would counsel women like our Clifford Chance heroine to negotiate for part-time or flexible work arrangements. It was a perfectly good business idea, but her explanation for why she liked the concept stuck in my mind: *I looked at the senior women in my firm, she told me, and there was no one whose life I wanted.*

Normally, I might have let that go as background noise, the sort of thing young women say to one another, but I had been reading a lot of Sheryl Sandberg. So I began formulating a response that I eventually realized needed to become its own treatise.

It starts like this: Several years ago, I wrote a book called *168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think*. One happy result of releasing the book was that numerous companies asked me to come speak about how people should manage their time. To make my workshop more useful, I started asking a few audience members to keep track of their time before our session. These time logs, which are half-hour-by-half-hour records of an entire week, revealed what issues people in the audience cared about, and how much time they spent at work, at home, and on personal activities.\* I'd analyze these logs with my audience guinea pigs so I could talk about the challenges people faced. These audience members could then tell their colleagues how they dealt with them. Our sessions were interactive and, I hoped, enlightening.

I speak to all sorts of audiences, but often the women's networking group at whichever company I was visiting decided to sponsor my talk. Many of the time logs I collected for my talks, therefore, would come from the female executives who ran these networking groups. Many of these women had children. And, over time, I noticed something.

Their lives didn't look that bad.

Perhaps it speaks to the pervasiveness of those Recitations of Dark Moments that I thought I'd see perpetual chaos, or at least novelist Allison Pearson's *I Don't Know How She Does It* scene of an executive distressing pies to make them look homemade, but nope. There were tough moments, to be sure, but I also saw kid time, husband time, leisure time, sleep. I'd even seen time logs from senior women in consulting firms, that industry in which the entrepreneur who wanted to start the coaching company hadn't seen anyone whose life she wanted. To be sure, not everyone would want such a life. In the log she kept for me in March 2014, Vanessa Chan, a partner in a major consulting firm and mother to two young girls, woke up Wednesday morning in one city, which was a different city from the one she woke up in Tuesday morning, which was not the city she lived in either. She arrived home late Wednesday after her girls were asleep. She gave the sleeping children a kiss before going back to work. If we wanted a tale inspiring work/life lamentation, we could focus on that scene.

But when you see the whole of a week, you see different moments too. Chan missed Tuesday and Wednesday, but she put her girls to bed more nights that week than she didn't. She read them multiple



chapters in *Little House on the Prairie*. I tallied it up, and she logged more time reading to her kids than, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey, the average stay-at-home mom of young kids reads to hers. She visited one daughter's school and set up playdates with other parents while she was there. She did very little work on the weekend (not that it never happened, she told me, but she tried to keep a lid on it). Instead, she organized a game night for her family and went skiing, and took her daughters to the Lego movie. She had a coffee date with her husband. She watched TV and did a session on the spin bike. Far from distressing pies to make them look homemade, Chan spent a reasonable amount of time designing a Pokémon cake for her daughter's upcoming birthday. In all her busyness, she had time to indulge her hobby of making and decorating Pinterest-worthy cakes.

Not everyone would want Chan's life. Chan herself didn't want it forever. She had entrepreneurial aspirations for a second career, and when I checked back a year later, she was starting a company called Head First Ventures, which focused on bringing to life product concepts that Chan developed to solve a wide range of consumer gripes and pet peeves. But even if not everyone would want Chan's life, I couldn't claim that no reasonable person would want this life either. Cake designing, skiing, and snuggly bedtime stories do not imply a work/life horror show.

I saw this same phenomenon in many allegedly horrid industries: finance, law, medicine. Women were leaning in to their careers, and they were leaning in to the rest of their lives too.

How did they do it? The math is straightforward. There are 168 hours in a week. If you work 50, and sleep 8 per night (56 hours per week in total), that leaves 62 hours for other things. If you work 60 hours and sleep 8 hours per night, that leaves 52 hours for other things. Time diary studies (mine and others) find that very few people consistently work more than 60 hours per week, even if they claim they do.

The time is there to have what matters. Like Chan, though, we have to choose to see this, and many people choose not to. In the discussion of women's life choices, we often focus on the crazy moments, or the difficult moments, which makes sense. They're darkly entertaining. These get the press. Other moments—like eating breakfast with your kids or playing board games together on the weekend—aren't talked about. High-powered people may not mention them, partly because they absorb the not-unfounded message that talking about family at work could hurt you professionally. Leisure also isn't something people stress in conversation. They may mention, casually, something that happened on *The Bachelor*, but they won't introduce themselves by announcing they spend their evenings watching it. When people ask how things are going, the modern professional answers this: "Busy." I do it myself.

But what if this logical leap—these stressful things happened, and therefore life is crazy and unsustainable—limits our stories? The human brain is structured for loss aversion, and so negative moments stand out more starkly than positive moments, particularly if they fit a popular thesis. We lament the softball game missed due to a late flight, and start down the road of soul searching and the need to limit hours at work or perhaps resign, but we don't rend our garments over the softball game missed because another kid had a swim meet at the exact same time. No one ever draws the conclusion from that hard-choice moment that you need to get rid of the other kid. We could draw numerous conclusions from our Clifford Chance associate's horrible day—she needs a different child care arrangement, she needs a different division of labor at home, she needs to be more clear about her boundaries at work, or some days are just miserable and such is the human condition—but these are not the conclusions that fit the chant of our modern Greek chorus: no one can have it all, *so don't you even try*.

I've been pondering this aspect of narrative, and why certain moments turn into stories that then develop their own power as they get repeated. Influential economist Robert Shiller explained the phenomenon best in a different context when he told *The Wall Street Journal* why people cling to the idea that they can pick hot

stocks, basically because they like these companies' stories: "Psychologists have argued there is a narrative basis for much of the human thought process, that the human mind can store facts around narratives, stories with a beginning and an end that have an emotional resonance. You can still memorize numbers, of course, but you need stories. . . . We need either a story or a theory, but stories come first." Language existed long before literacy. We absorb information as tales you might hear around a campfire, with points of evidence leading to an epiphany that teaches a lesson, a lesson that matches what the larger culture wants you to believe, even if (another narrative device) it sometimes masquerades as a "hidden truth."

I love stories as much as anyone, but these campfire stories built around dark moments miss the complexity of life. You cannot look at Chan's long Wednesday without seeing *Little House on the Prairie* too. The traditional format leads to the conclusion that life is madness. It is either/or. A commenter on the Modern Mrs. Darcy blog summarized this worldview, explaining why she'd opted out of the workforce: "If you get your joy from a paycheck and a pat on the head, go for it. I prefer hugs and dandelions."

Look at the whole of life, though, all the minutes that make up our weeks, and you see a different picture. Those questions lobbed at successful women as if any given cocktail party were a presidential news conference—*How do you do it? How do you manage? How do you balance?*—have a straightforward answer. Life has space for paychecks *and* dandelions, business trips *and* Pokémon cakes. We can carry many responsibilities and still revel in our own sweet time.

I am more interested in this entire mosaic. Many people have placed the tiles of their professional and personal worlds together in ways that give them space to strive toward their dreams at work and home. As I tried to convey this holistic view to people, though, I often hit this problem: I had no statistics I could call upon. Some organizations do phone surveys, but there are vast problems with just asking people how they spend their time (more on this later in this book). Time diary studies are more accurate. The American Time Use Survey and studies from the Pew Research Center and elsewhere look at how mothers and fathers spend their time, breaking it down by whether people work full-time or part-time, in or outside the home. Full-time jobs, however, are a diverse set, as are jobs held by people with bachelor's degrees (another common demographic cut).

I wanted to get at the idea of "big jobs," and understand what the lives of people with marquee careers and families looked like. But I had nothing beyond the stories of people I interviewed, and the slowly accumulating pile of time logs from speeches to document the reality. As I read more "can't have it all" stories, I realized that people were arguing or, worse, making huge life decisions based on anecdotes.

I wanted data. The best way to get that data, I decided, was to produce some.

### The Mosaic Project

In 2013, I began seeking out time logs from women who, by at least one definition, had it all:

- They earned more than \$100,000 per year
- They had at least one child (under age eighteen) living at home

I recruited women who might keep track of their time via my blog and various professional networks I'm involved in, and I branched out from there. I sent volunteers a spreadsheet and asked them to record their time for a week. Most received these instructions: "Write down what you're doing, as often as you remember, in as much detail as you wish to share. Keep going for a week, then send it back, and we can discuss it." Some people used Word documents so they could describe their lives more at length. Some used apps such as Toggl to produce more precise measures than my spreadsheet with its thirty-minute cells

allowed. Some altered my 336-cell spreadsheet to turn it into a 672-piece mosaic of fifteen-minute blocks.

When people sent the logs back, I tallied hours spent on work, sleep, TV, exercise, reading, and housework/errands. I had conversations by phone or e-mail with most of the women. I wanted to learn more about their strategies, and many people asked for feedback about their logs: how they might solve time management challenges and find more time for fun. I approached these time logs partly as an anthropologist, studying these new ways of making work and life fit together.

This book is about the results of what I came to call the Mosaic Project: a time diary study of 1,001 days in the lives of professional women and their families. Everyone has opinions on having it all. I want to show, moment by moment, how it's really done.

At least that's the hope. Any project like this raises questions. Perhaps most obvious, why women? I hope this book will be useful for anyone who wishes to have a full life, which these days certainly includes many men in demanding careers as well. I overheard my husband's half of a conversation once with a new father who was trying to figure out how he could build a career at his firm and spend time with his son. It was the same work/life balance conversation women have been having for decades, even if neither guy would ever host a panel discussion on the topic.

I focused on women for a few reasons. First, highly successful women are still more likely to be in two-career families than men in similar positions, with all the juggling that implies. One study of medical researchers who won K08 or K23 grants, which are early career National Institutes of Health (NIH) awards that demonstrate high potential, found that only 44.9 percent of these up-and-coming male researchers who were married/partnered had spouses or domestic partners who worked full-time. For women, the figure was 85.6 percent. That's not to say that men with partners who work part-time or who stay home with their kids don't also want to have full lives. Likewise, a number of women in the Mosaic Project had stay-at-home partners, or partners who didn't work as many hours as they did. These categories are not cut-and-dried.

However, I have found that, on the margins, successful women still have a certain vision of what their involvement with their families should be. I suspect it is benchmarked against a false perception of how stay-at-home mothers spend their time, but to put a positive spin on it, women really want to spend time with their families. They want to be intimately involved in their home lives. So a breadwinning mother with a husband who stays home with the kids tells me that she gets up with her children in the morning so she can spend time with them before work and her husband can sleep. Another describes her husband "punching out" when she gets home from work in the evening; she takes over the evening shift. Few men with stay-at-home partners expect to come home and enjoy a martini while their wives keep the children hushed. Still, they aren't facing a social message that they are somehow neglecting their children by spending their days earning the cash that keeps their families solvent.

People often speak of the work/home roles that high-earning women navigate as a second shift. But they can be viewed less pejoratively too. Because women are navigating these dual roles, they produce new and creative ways to move around the tiles in the mosaics of their lives. I'd seen this anecdotally in time logs, and I knew this from my own life, but as a work-from-home, entrepreneurial sort, I assumed I had freedoms others did not. Indeed, in Anne-Marie Slaughter's *Atlantic* article, the conclusion was that women who managed both to be mothers and to have big careers "are superhuman, rich, or self-employed." As the Mosaic logs poured in, though, I soon saw that even conventionally employed women developed creative strategies for building lives that allowed them to have it all, not just in theory, but reflected in how they spent their hours.

That's why I studied women. But here's another question: why *mothers*? Certainly, it's possible to have a

fulfilling life without having children, and one recent poll done by Citi and LinkedIn found that women are more likely to believe this than men. Some 86 percent of men said having children was part of their definition of success, but only 73 percent of professional women included children in their definition of having it all. I hope that, in time, the investments people make in extended family, friends, and community will become a bigger part of the work/life conversation. Right now, however, people with children are the vanguard. As they create new ways of placing their tiles, the strategies they employ can be instructive, whether your definition of success includes having children or not.

As for the \$100,000 salary requirement, I needed an objective number. I know this measure of success is incomplete as well. I am aware on an extremely *personal* level that some careers pay more than others. A few minutes spent perusing the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates files convinced me that if I wanted to assume a good living, I went into the wrong line of work. The median wage for "writers and authors" is \$55,870; the 90th percentile is \$115,740. Meanwhile, the median wage for lawyers is \$113,310. This means that an utterly middling lawyer will earn as much as a writer at the top of her game. I know that by using \$100,000, I'm going to wind up with some mid-level lawyers in my sphere of "successful women," and I'll wind up not counting enormously influential people who have achieved success in lower-paying fields.

Nonetheless, earning six figures indicates you have achieved financial success, even if you're not in the 99th percentile for your industry. You can support a family on your own, whatever any other adults in the household choose to do. Very few women (in the United States, less than 4 percent of employed women overall) earn six figures. I wish that figure were higher, but it isn't, which suggests that women who have achieved it are doing something worth studying. Even if it's true that some careers readily yield six-figure incomes, one reason many women *don't* choose these high-paying fields is a perception that you'll work crazy hours and have no control over your life. From these time logs, I found this was not true, though I also found that another objection I heard—it's easy to have it all if you earn six figures because you can just outsource everything!—wasn't automatically true either. Many women made their lives more difficult than necessary by not taking advantage of their affluence, a phenomenon I'll explore in later chapters.

I had collected 143 complete logs when I and the researcher who worked with me crunched the numbers to understand these 1,001 ( $143 \times 7$ ) days from a quantitative perspective. I received dozens more logs I couldn't use in the quantitative half of this project because they were missing a day or two or were not detailed enough to provide an accurate daily count of time spent working and sleeping (the two categories that generally occupied the largest chunks of hours in people's lives). They still provided qualitatively interesting fodder. I interviewed some of these women for the book, and others who met the criteria but didn't keep logs, to learn their strategies. Many more logs have continued to come in since I stopped "officially" collecting them for data, and this book reflects insights from those logs too.

I appreciate all these logs, because tracking time takes time and effort. This is why most people don't undertake a study like this when they want to understand how many hours people devote to things. Instead, researchers ask people to estimate: How many hours do you work? How many hours do you spend taking care of your children? The study on K08 and K23 grant recipients, which I mentioned above, used this method to estimate how many hours men and women spent on household tasks. They asked.

Asking people to estimate how they spend their time is simple and straightforward. Unfortunately, it produces unreliable answers. Most of us don't know how many hours we devote to different things. We don't know how many hours we work or sleep or watch TV. People will give answers to survey takers, but those are just guesses. And worse, they're guesses influenced by systematic bias. If everyone in your industry talks about their eighty-hour workweeks, even if logs show they're probably averaging fifty-five hours, you will talk about your eighty-hour workweeks too. In a world where we complain about how busy

we are, we're not going to mention that five out of seven nights per week we sleep just fine. It's the night that a kid woke up at two a.m. and you had to catch a seven a.m. flight that you talk about at parties or mention in your departure memo. It's not that the horrible night didn't happen. It's just that it's no more emblematic of life than any other night. It must be taken in context.

A 168-hour time log removes most of these problems. People can lie on these logs, to be sure, but it's harder to do. You'd have to systematically input more work and less sleep on the log itself, and most people aren't that intent on lying. Phone survey lies are lies of ease, not nefariousness. A time log reminds the respondent that a day has 24 hours, and a week has 168. No matter how amazing we are, all of our activities must, and do, fit within these bounds.

To be sure, a time diary study has limits too. As one woman aptly pointed out, when you have a baby, morning, evening, and weekend time rarely involves doing anything for thirty minutes straight. Here's an entry from one woman's weekend: "Check on work/[son] play outside/read book while watching/wash/hang/fold laundry." Many people described the mishmash of what happens after dinner or on weekend mornings as "family time." There may be pattering around the house, some housework, some child care, some TV, some playing, but those time blocks probably aren't devoted to one single activity. I don't discount the "?" entries on time logs. Modern life features a lot of "?" time. Furthermore, a key requirement of a time diary study like the Mosaic Project is that you have to be able to describe time in words. This seems straightforward to me. I'm working. I'm driving. I'm sleeping. If I'm multitasking by checking e-mail while watching TV, I'll write that too.

Not everyone thinks this way. One of the most poignant scenes in Brigid Schulte's 2014 book, *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time*, involves her attempting to fill out sociologist John Robinson's time spreadsheet, then abandoning the Excel format when she decided she could not shoehorn her life into a grid. Instead, she created a rather dramatic document: "2 am–4am Try to breathe. Discover that panic comes in the center of the chest—often in one searing spot. Fear in the belly. Dread just below that. The should haves and self-recrimination oddly come at the left shoulder . . ." I have had a few people, often extremely creative entrepreneurs, describe the same challenge. People have different personalities. To stick with a time log for 168 hours, you probably need a practical personality closer to mine ("it's good enough") than a free-form or perfectionist sort.

There is also the question of whether the weeks logged are "typical" or "atypical." I maintain that there are no typical weeks. Attempts to label weeks as atypical are what create faulty impressions of our lives. I don't instruct people to start filling out their time logs at a given day or hour. Starting a log on Monday morning is good, but you can also start the log on Wednesday at two a.m., as long as you keep going for the next 168 hours. Yet for the Mosaic Project, I saw that people generally aimed to log weeks they saw as more typical than atypical. A number of women started over with new logs when they lost workdays due to illnesses and snow and other unforeseen events, even though these atypical events add up. Most didn't log weeks with holidays or vacation days, though these things happen too. Overall, I suspect this tendency to hunt for typical weeks—often weeks spent at work in a significant way—means people's work hour totals for their diary weeks were higher than one would find averaged over a longer period of time.

I had to make judgment calls on what to count in different categories. Everyone in the Mosaic Project e-mailed me at some point, and I spoke with most on the phone too, so I tried to clarify anything ambiguous, for example if "coffee with Lou" was a work meeting or a personal one. If a log was too sparse, I chose not to include it.

A few other sources of bias: The act of observing something changes the thing being observed. I don't always read to my kids as much as I would like, but when I record my time, I'm more diligent about it. I

spend less time perusing social media, if for no other reason than I don't want people to know I check Twitter fifteen times per day. I imagine others do the same thing.

The women in this data set aren't a representative sample of all high-earning women with children. No doubt the truly overwhelmed couldn't (or wouldn't) find time to fill out a time log. Also, many Mosaic Project participants read my blog or have read my books. The vast majority of humanity has not, so that's one difference. I think of my readers as extremely competent people, though another possibility is that people become heavy consumers of time management literature because they think they need help in this area. About a third of participants worked for companies where I bartered speeches in exchange for time logs. They came from a variety of different fields and regions, though they often lived in or near major cities, because that's where six-figure jobs tend to be concentrated. Their children ranged from babies to teenagers. Their family sizes ranged from one to four kids. I had married/partnered moms and single moms (I didn't make having a partner a criterion for having it all, though some might argue it is).

I won't claim I've done things perfectly, but despite the limitations of my study, I think the Mosaic Project captures a more holistic picture of the lives of professional women and their families than I've seen elsewhere. In these logs, we see how people truly spend their hours. We see life moment by moment, rather than hearing about these moments after they've been twisted by the human impulse to turn life into a story with a conclusion ("Life is crazy!").

To be sure, the logs did *not* show that life was a breeze. I am not a Pollyanna; all is not perfect. There were moments on these time logs when people *were* crazed, and some people were more crazed than others. Some women described their lives in great detail, stretching those Excel cells to convey moments that made me cringe. One woman locked her keys in the car on the first day she was dropping a child off at a new day care, thus making that already traumatic morning even more traumatic. Another woman, awakened in the night by a newly potty-trained child's accident, left the house at 5:45 a.m. to squeeze in a workout and "halfway to gym realize I don't have my sneakers, have to turn around, no Spin class today."

But these logs did not indicate a 168-hour show of desperation, as you might expect from the "maxed out" anecdotes dominating the literature about women, work, and life. There are sweet moments of joy and fun, too. A lawyer's 8:30 p.m. Friday night entry shows this: "See a sign at favorite wine store that says they have a 'life changing pinot noir.' I can't pass that up." A manager at a chemical manufacturing plant went to a balloon festival and an alligator festival with her family on the same weekend and also squeezed in "Shopping by myself!!!"—those three exclamation points summing up the happiness of this experience. There are snuggles in bed. There is space for blowing bubbles on the driveway. In a beautiful meta-moment, a woman wrote of attending a mosaic-making class to tap the artistic side of her personality. There are strange juxtapositions: a woman ironing on a Saturday, followed immediately by a facial, perhaps as a reward. Such is the mishmash of life.

This varied nature is what I want to convey every time someone asks "How does she do it?" What we think of as either/or is often not so stark. The logs from the Mosaic Project show what life really looks like for women with big careers and families. It is about the strategies people with full lives use to make space for their priorities, and what we can all adopt from these strategies to make space for priorities in our lives too.

### The Good Life

I wrote in the introduction that I am interested in what it means to live a good life, and how one can construct a good life. As I was compiling the data, a reporter asked me if the people in the Mosaic Project were happy about their strategies.

It makes sense that the good life should be one that makes you happy. Some women were voluntarily

introspective after keeping their logs, and I have shared their insights throughout this book, but I didn't ask people whether they were happy, partly because the question is so fraught. Happy when? While on the phone with me? Life is not static. Some participants recognized elements of life that didn't work; when I circled back six to twelve months later, they'd made major changes from leaving jobs to moving. One woman who'd moved and switched day cares actually used the word "glorious" to describe her new morning routine.

We know from surveys of moment-by-moment contentment that people are happier while engaged in "intimate relations" than while driving to work. Any given week likely features both. Hour-by-hour happiness doesn't rise with household incomes past \$75,000 a year, though overall life satisfaction keeps climbing well past \$100,000. Random phone polls don't find many very high income households—because there aren't that many, one constraint I faced in enrolling people in this study—but one survey found that the vast majority of people in high-income (\$100,000-plus) households called themselves "very happy." None called themselves "not too happy."

Be that as it may, here's an interesting statistic from one Pew Research Center analysis: women find every activity more tiring than men do. This is true for work, child care, and housework, which might make sense, but it's even true for leisure (though we're talking low absolute numbers in this category). I don't know why this is. It may be the stories we tell ourselves that there is always more we should be doing. It may be a comparison to our partners. In two-income households with kids, fathers have about 4.5 more hours of leisure per week than mothers, though they also log 10.7 more hours at the office. Perhaps women feel constantly "on call" in their lives, at work and at home. Stress can lead to complaints, even if objectively things look good. After I shared one woman's work and sleep hour totals with her—a perfect 40 for work, and about 8 hours per night for sleep—she wrote me that "On paper, it kind of seems like I have nothing to complain about! And yet I still do."

It is the *and yet I still do* part that inspires much angst and speculation in work/life literature, and it is no doubt at the core of why plenty of women in the Mosaic Project, and in the world at large, feel that they don't "have it all," even if they meet my definition. People seek answers: maybe it's that we're not mentally present, or that our leisure time comes in bits of "time confetti," to use Schulte's memorable image. But no one gets a perfect life. Not people who stay home with their children, not those who are married or not married, not those who have kids or don't have kids.

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