

## Want Less Stress? Be Flexible.

True confessions: I missed the deadline for this article. Offering no excuses, let me explain. There is a lot going on in my life. I had to craft a bold strategic plan for the best girls' school in the land.

Then there was the opening of school, and the requisite convocation speech. (You can check it out at [www.emmawillard.org](http://www.emmawillard.org). Click on EmmaNow and you can even hear it.) Of course there is the relentless gush of email to be triaged, the appointments associated with being the mayor of a little universe, and a husband who thinks it might be good to do something together once in a while. Once you toss in the “wanna-dos” along with the “must-dos,” the “to-dos” outstrip my daily 24-hour allotment. You live this reality, yes? Raise your hand if you can tell me about a day you accomplished precisely what

you wanted with time left over for a Pilates class, a manicure, and a slowly sipped mug of herbal tea.

Balance. (Hear me snort as I say the word.) When did this concept emerge as a desirable life achievement? My unstudied guess is that we can attribute this to the success of the modern women's movement. We naively believed that if we could make our way back into the workplace—if we were savvy enough to add 8 to 10 hours of professional accomplishment to birthing babies and managing households—surely we could shuffle the daily 24 to sustain a sense of well-being. What we learned along the way was that our stress multiplied exponentially. Seeking balance has become a nuanced way of saying we want fewer immovable deadlines, fewer agonizing decisions that require choices between competing life priorities. What we want is less stress.

My summer reading included *Womenomics* by Claire Shipman and Katty Kay, promoting a phenomenon they call “pink power”: the new reality that women's success in the workplace has given them greater opportunities to negotiate for flexibility—the number one factor cited as desirable by women in search of the elusive “balance.” Not surprisingly, they document that women experience the workplace differently from men. Less motivated by status and achievement, the majority of women are seeking a professional setting that supports the integration of personal *and* professional goals. Shipman and Kay posit that women are now uniquely positioned to bring substantive change to corporate settings by negotiating for lifestyles permitting personal definitions of success. Imagine this. For the first time in modern history, women can negotiate for balance, choosing to prioritize in ways that serve them, choosing flexibility over cash compensation or promotions. Women can choose to have less stress.

I am no different from the women surveyed in *Womenomics*. I love what I do because of the flexibility I can create for myself. My secret to achieving less stress is pretty darn simple: I exercise the power of choice—the power flexibility gives me—on a daily basis. Just exercising that power reminds me anew I have it. Certainly some days there is less choice than others. However, when the magazine editor gives me a September 18 deadline for a magazine you will read in November, I see an opportunity to exercise personal choice, to use my time in a way that serves my life agenda. (Indeed, I know that she created that deadline to ensure she had less stress in *her* life.) When was the last time you exercised pink power? When did you last negotiate for flexibility? How amazing to discover that balance is a gift you can give yourself. **e**

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