

PUBLICATION

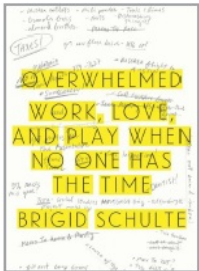
On My Bookshelf – Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has The Time, by Brigid Schulte

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Brigid Schulte begins this easy-to-read book that both hits home painfully and hilariously mirrors so much of the "overwhelm" of our lives, with a word picture:

It is just after 10 a.m. on a Tuesday and I am racing down Route 1 in College Park, Maryland. The Check Engine light is on. The car tax sticker on my windshield has expired. The cell phone I'd just been using to talk to one of my kids' teachers has disappeared into the seat crack. And I'm late.

Welcome to our lives – the lives of early 21st century working women juggling responsible careers, family, home and marriage without catastrophe! How did we get here? We have the kind of lives that our mothers and grandmothers fought hard to achieve, so that we, their daughters and granddaughters, could indeed grow up to be anything we wanted, including doctors, scientists, astronauts and, yes, even lawyers. Why are we, beneficiaries of the widest opportunities for education, good health and advancement ever known for women, living such miserable, stressed-out lives? Is it our jobs? Our families?



Brigid Schulte is an award-winning journalist for *The Washington Post* with two school-age daughters. She describes our modern schedules as "time confetti" – a wonderfully descriptive image. The cover of the book is a visual depiction of time confetti. Her book addresses the causes and effects of time confetti, and possible solutions.

Work: The section on Work starts with the statistics. In the 1960s, about 38 percent of mothers with young children worked outside the home, and by the 2000s, 75 percent did.

Totaling up the hours, the total hours of paid work by both parents was about 676 hours – or 28 days per year. Imagine adding an entire month of work to your schedule, on top of childcare, housework and the rest of our lives. Schulte then reviews the history of work and childcare in America. Part-time work is not, necessarily, the answer, as she finds when she visits the Netherlands, where a large number of mothers are able to work part-time, and finds that the time confetti is just as bad due to constant shifting of roles. She notes that our workplaces still, to a lesser or greater extent, retain a vision of the "Ideal Worker" who is free from all outside duties and able to be totally devoted to the workplace, the first to arrive in the morning and the last to leave.

Love: If there is an "Ideal Worker" model, there is also the "Ideal Mother" model which, if anything, is even more damaging to our lives. This model makes us feel inadequate, as if our children will fail, will not get into college and will not get a good job, if we fail to do absolutely everything in our power to stimulate and nurture our children at a level unknown in past generations. She does a very effective job describing the ambivalence and inadequacy that so many of us experience as mothers and as wives.

Play: This is the section that, perhaps, seems most revolutionary. Schulte notes that active play disappears for most of us as we grow up. While men may retain a small bit of it through sports, women tend to lose all play activities, and she cites a number of sources to the effect that play provides specific beneficial effects for us, if we only made the effort to do it. Frankly, for most of us, the idea of setting aside time for play – within the

worlds of work and family that already seem to demand way more than 100 percent of our time – seems truly unrealistic.

Finally, the author gives some suggestions for how we may transform time confetti into time serenity, both on an individual basis and as a society. Her Appendix titled "Do One Thing" has a number of worthwhile thoughts. Thinking about our lives as lawyers, I think some of them, in particular, bear repeating here:

- Doing good work, having quality time for family and meaningful relationships, and the space to refresh the soul is about having a good life. It has never been just a "mommy issue."
- Ambiguity is the enemy in the workplace that fuels the overwhelm. Define your mission. Set clear parameters and performance measures to define how much is enough.
- Remember most of your to-do list will never get done and a lot of it belongs in "the other five percent" column anyway.
- Plan. Do. Review. Find a system to manage the activities you choose to do *in time* that works for you. Create routines. Automate. Cut down on the number of small decisions you have to make in a day, reserving your willpower for the big decisions you really *do* need your full brain power to make.
- Park the helicopter. You don't have to do everything on your own and better than everyone else.
- Put down the expert books. Declare the mommy wars over – we've all been on the same side in search of the good life all along.
- Happiness first. Happiness breeds success and achievement. The converse is not necessarily true.
- Don't wait until the dust bunnies are gone and the fridge is full to share time with friends.

I had the opportunity to participate in a video interview with Brigid Schulte when she visited our Baker Donelson office in Washington, D.C. Her suggestions about possible transformative changes to our career – working in the private law firm – are provocative but challenging. Many of her suggestions are probably impossible in our environment, but others are worth at least some consideration.

We in the private practice of law are dominated by the billable hour. Maybe that will change – we read article after article heralding the "death of the billable hour," but for now, the billable hour dominates the lives of lawyers in private practice, as it dominates the lives of many other professionals. "Face time" really does matter, and exhortations to "work smarter" not "work harder" may be of only minimal use. However, we can all take individual responsibility for reviewing our lives and trying to banish the overwhelm and bring at least a measure of time serenity into our lives and the lives of our families, and many of the ideas in this book offer a good start.