

# The Three Balls Theory

**Life's one huge juggling act. You can't win but you *can* try!**

**Life is one great juggling act. We're constantly having to weigh up the demands placed upon us and choose how we're going to allocate what limited resources we might have, be they money, time, love or attention.**

In this highly pressurised world one major area of stress and anxiety, and one that affects us throughout our adult life, is how we're going to divide up our time, our attention and our love across three very important subdivisions. It's a challenge that causes us tremendous pain and it's one that virtually nobody finds a way to solve. We call it **The Three Balls Theory**.

It's something which no doubt, will have preoccupied you since early adulthood; but now you're **in your prime**, has anything changed or are you still chasing your tail in the same old way?

## The theory

So, what exactly are we talking about?

In the modern world, particularly for those who have to go out to work, there are three conflicting pressures on our lives. These are described below but *certainly not* in order of importance. What is truly important is the very crux of the dilemma.

First, there is our job, our career, our means of earning money.

Second, there are our relationships, usually our family. This includes our spouse or partner, our children and our parents or other close relatives, particularly if they need looking after.

Third, there is our self. That is, our needs as an individual.

These are the three balls that we must juggle and try to keep concurrently in the air. It's an impossible task except, perhaps, for a very lucky few. Many people may think that they've got everything nicely sorted but they're almost certainly missing something. Others may not see the problem or ignore it. However, it will almost certainly come back to haunt them. How poignant,

for example, to hear a man who was a great success at work with an active social life, reflect with sadness that his daughter was just off to university, and that "*he had never seen her grow up*".

## Scenario one

It's relatively easy to keep two of the balls in the air. For a stereotypical male, this is quite likely to involve an active and stimulating career plus a good helping of "self". It's the family side that is likely to suffer.

At work, there is all the buzz and stimulation that comes with carving out a career, achieving recognition, earning money, playing politics and meeting interesting people. And there's the reassuring thought that all this hard work and the long hours are done for the family.

And as a reward, one should be able to have a bit of time for oneself. This might be playing or watching sport, going down the pub with your mates, reading, indulging in your favourite pastime, or just chilling out.

So where is the guilt and pressure likely to come from? That's right, from home. The people you'll have missed out on will be your partner, your children and your (ageing) parents. That's where the source of strife lies.

## Scenario two

This possibly reflects the traditional female role. Here, there is obviously a great deal of concentration and devotion - possibly all-consuming - to the family. Certainly the responsibility for the smooth running of the domestic environment is in the hands of this person.

What of the other two balls? Traditionally, if the person works then they probably would have had a part-time job rather than a full-blown career. This allows some time for personal pursuits but, underneath it all, there is a great feeling of under-achievement and lack of self-fulfilment as talents

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and aspirations are suppressed for the overall benefit of the family.

### Scenario three

Here, perhaps, we see a more modern female role, with the person pursuing a full career and/or the attempt to have some personal space. But the demands of the family still exist and either something has to give or the stresses and strains become too much and manifest themselves in exhaustion, poor health and family arguments.

### The analysis

These are just a few of the possible scenarios; there are plenty of others. Suppressing the career “ball” for the sake of the family and personal enjoyment and satisfaction may be a very modern approach in trying to achieve the right kind of work-life balance in a highly pressurised world. However, it comes at a price. Firstly, there may not be the income to sustain an elaborate lifestyle. And secondly, there cannot be regrets. Living the rest of one’s life pondering the “might have beens” will only lead to sadness and resentment and blame.

You have one life and you must decide how you want to play it – for real. It’s not a dress rehearsal, this is it! You can only make decisions about the future, not the past. So make your decisions and move on.

### The point of all this

The point of all this is that you are not alone. Everyone in the world is grappling with exactly the same problem – how do you keep the three balls in the air.

Most people are aware of the problem, pretty much all day every day.

“Should I stay at the office or deal with issues at home?”

“I know I’m not spending enough time with my elderly parents”

“I really ought to go home, but alright then just one more...”

“How can I find time to do something just for me?”

Some people may not consider the issue in any great depth at all despite the “earache” they may get. But one day it will strike home. And as the old saying goes, how many people say on their deathbed, “*I wish I’d spent more time at the office.*”

Every person has to decide for themselves how they are going to try to find a balance. In a domestic household this should be done as a

partnership or a family with the interests of all considered. Beware; there is no easy solution because there is no one solution. And in today’s world with material pressures and increasing debt levels the problem is particularly acute.

### The way forward

Balancing the three aspects of your life is not a one-off event; it is a challenge which is in a constant state of flux. Sometimes you just find yourself “going with the flow”, for example when you need to earn to pay the bills and you devote most of your energies to helping the children grow up. This can lead to an unconscious neglect of other facets of your life, in particular, certain personal relationships.

However, now you’re **in your prime**, your responsibilities and your life in general will be changing – whether or not you want them to – so now’s a great time to make some changes and ensure that in future you cope more effectively with everyone’s needs, including your own.

At this age you may realise that you’re now living in an “empty nest”, your career may be slowing down, financial pressures may be easing, parents may be growing old. And so you can look at re-balancing and new ways of re-juggling those 3 balls for the future. But you may find that your plans are not the same as your partner’s – you may discover that you have drifted apart mentally, emotionally and aspirationally. Just when you want to slow down, your partner may see new unexplored horizons ahead. When you want time for yourself, your partner may want to re-discover shared time together.

So, these can be very taxing times for **in my primers**. We’re probably less flexible than we used to be and now have more entrenched views about the ways of the world and our place in it. We’re also part of what’s known as the “sandwich generation”. Although we’re still active, energetic, in control with lives of our own, we sit between two other generations. There are the children, probably still needing help, advice and financial support. There are our parents growing less able and needing attention, time and comfort.

### The “in my prime” message

These transitional times are full of opportunity for those **in their prime**. Reviewing our lives, where we’ve been, where we’re going and where our responsibilities and loyalties lie is something we will have been doing all our lives. Now that we’ve the opportunity to go through a major re-balancing we must make sure that we are clear about what we want ourselves and also that we’re sensitive to the needs and wishes of those around us.

Like all challenges it can be met. But remember, the task is by no means an easy one!