

# CHAPTER 1

## THE NEW “*PROBLEM WITH NO NAME*”



*And when women and men think, the first step in progress is taken.*

---Elizabeth Cady Stanton

. . . When, as a younger woman, I was contemplating how my husband and I would combine parenting and work, I was struck that none of the choices on the conventional list appealed to me. To my mind they included:

- *Traditional*, with a father highly focused on work and the mother highly focused on caring for the children and managing the home;
- *Semi-traditional*, with a father highly focused on work and the mother working part-time or full-time outside the home yet still the predominant home and family manager;
- *Classic dual-career*, with both the father and mother highly career focused, struggling mightily to manage their lives outside of work.

I was looking for a fourth option, seemingly not a choice on the menu. It included both my husband and me working outside the home to jointly meet the economic needs of the family—at a more manageable pace and workload but still pursuing professional growth in careers we cared about—as well as both of us playing a central role in the care of the home and family. As a couple we would work as a

team to manage it all, and intentionally slow down the velocity to enjoy these multiple roles.

This book offers that fourth option—the Libra approach to life, work, and relationships—and illuminates how we can shift our thinking and our lives in powerful, positive directions. The Libra approach is the twenty-first century work-life model for men and women wanting to write their own scripts. It is defined by greater sustainability, greater equality, and greater satisfaction. It is defined by men and women together crafting their unique work-life solution in that vast middle ground between working all the time and not working at all, between mothers do this, fathers do that, and everything needs to be split precisely down the middle. Instead couples define, and redefine, roles based on skills and life goals, evaluating, strategizing, calibrating, and recalibrating as they move together through the weeks, months, and years.

Women and men are searching for something different—another way to put together the puzzle pieces of their lives—but they lack a roadmap and they don't know how to get from here to there. This book will show you how it is possible to create lives characterized by both satisfying work and deep family involvement, prove that it is possible for couples to model a strong and enduring partnership for their children that grows and deepens rather than erodes through time, and help you to take back control of your life by creating time and space for what energizes and strengthens you, even in the midst of so many demands.

While the provocative headlines swing us from one extreme to the other, behind the drama, behind all the fuss, there are the many quiet, untold stories. They are the stories of men and women who are finding their way, who are breaking the shackles of gender, who are creating time for their families and their work and their lives, and who are living their lives in a way that many say can't be done. While we seem to be stuck in the old scripts, there are many powerful journeys of men and women finding a new way through the work-life gauntlet. This book shares many of their stories.

This book will help you understand the challenges that come together and drive us toward highly gendered norms and overextended lives. It will explore how these forces profoundly impact our perceived options and choices, and most importantly, it will illuminate an alternative, the Libra solution. You will come to understand the abundant benefits of the Libra work-life model—for individuals, for couples, for children, and for workplaces. Through the real-life experiences of men and women, you will come to deeply understand this work-life model and see how obstacles to living a Libra life can be recognized, managed, and overcome.

When you look back on your life—as a professional, as a parent, and as part of a couple—in five years, ten years, twenty years, you should not be left with the vague question that is the hallmark of the *new problem with no name*: “How did I get here?” Following the Libra approach will enable you to say with satisfaction, “I have played a key role in creating the life I always wanted.” ...