



CREATING BALANCE

*"True balance is a shady spot by the side of the road before we move on."
--John E. Jones, PhD.*

THE MYTH OF A BALANCED LIFE

Rarely over the course of our lifespan will we have a week, a month or even a day when we give equal time to all facets of our lives. There will always be one or two areas grabbing for our attention while the others remain on the back burner. This is the nature of life. Because we each have our own set of goals, desires, and demands, each of us has our own notion of what a "balanced" life looks and feels like. What is perceived as balance to one person may throw another totally out of whack. And, as we age and mature, our notion of balance and what is important naturally changes.

WHAT IS WORK/LIFE BALANCE?

Balance has to do with how we use the time we have and how we experience harmony among the many facets of life. People who have a sense of balance understand that balance is like a see – saw, tipping one way and then another, periodically sitting centered in the middle. They focus on what is most important at the time, identify what they can influence in the situation, give that full attention, and then shift focus to the next area needing attention. They also remember to focus on their own needs.

Work-life balance requires a conscious balancing between work and personal life so that one doesn't dominate the other. One learns to attend to both work life and personal life and to find satisfaction in both – **most** of the time.

WHAT THROWS US OFF BALANCE

- Constant worrying
- An excess of ambition or win-at-any-cost competitiveness
- Feeling responsible for most things
- Perfectionism or unrealistic beliefs or expectations about what is "good enough"
- Unclear goals, desires, or priorities
- Challenges with managing time
- Fuzzy boundaries tendency to abandon ones own needs and preferences to avoid conflict or gain approval
- Difficulty relaxing

TEN POSITIVE REMEDIES TO PROMOTE HARMONY: (NOT LISTED IN PRIORITY ORDER)

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Rather than ask yourself "Is this area of my life balanced or out of balance?" consider asking questions that help you arrange your life in ways that feel more harmonious to you. Try asking, "Do I feel empowered or disempowered in this area of my life? Are the choices I'm making in this area adding to my energy or robbing me of my energy? Are my actions taking me closer to the future I want or keeping me stuck in the past?"

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FIND STRATEGIES THAT WORK FOR YOU

Discover your own balance: what evokes a sense of harmony *for you*. However you define balance, it will be different than how the person sitting next to you defines it. Discover and honor what feeds your soul. Is it a few hours a week unencumbered by work worries? Is it sticking to thirty-five (or fifty) hours of work per week? Is it some solitude when you first get home or at bedtime? Is it having an intimate conversation with your spouse or close friend each day? Is it attending a weekly musical performance?

SCHEDULE YOUR WORK LIFE AROUND YOUR PERSONAL LIFE

It may seem counterintuitive, but those who manage life/work demands best structure their off-work activities as carefully as their on-work activities. Schedule vacations, time with friends and family, sports or fitness activities **first**. Then schedule your work. You'll be far more likely to be able to do it all with a plan.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Recharging your batteries is important. Get enough sleep so you are rested. When you wake up, eat breakfast. Schedule time to be outside to re-energize yourself and get natural light. Honor your own circadian rhythms. You are naturally more alert certain times of the day, so decide how you can capitalize on your peak energy time whether it is the morning, afternoon or evening so you have effortless energy and vitality.

BE PRESENT

There's time and there's focused time. Multi-tasking isn't what it's cracked up to be. When you have only one hour to read or play with your kids, be there. Have fun. Train your mind to be where you are. Try to focus all of your energy where you are in the moment. You'll accomplish more – and be more satisfied while you're doing it.

KNOW AND HONOR YOUR VALUES

Know what you value in life. Know when you are acting with integrity and when you are not. Find ways to honor your values every day. (For example, if you value true collaboration, find ways to work closely with others on a regular basis.) You will be more fulfilled in work and off work when you are honoring what you truly value.

Practice Tip: make a list of “*what's important to me now?*” Then date and post it where you can see it everyday. When you review your current portfolio of commitments, ask yourself, “*are they consistent with this list? What adjustments are called for?*” When you are presented with a new opportunity or invitation, use the list to inform your choices. Revisit it every few months.

DEFINE THE THINGS IN YOUR LIFE TO WHICH YOU WILL SAY “ABSOLUTELY YES!” AND “NO WAY!”

Once you are clear on your values, define the activities to which you will say yes on a regular basis. Ask yourself what truly feeds your soul. Make a list of the top five and make sure you incorporate them into your life on a frequent basis. Then make a list of the top five things you will say no to. If you don't have a no-list, chances are you'll be frustrated or overwhelmed at best. Part of maturity is making choices, letting go of nice-to-do, even fun activities to make room for what is most important. Be clear on what is on your no-list. Ask those around you for support in avoiding these activities.

TRY SOMETHING NEW

Identify a couple things you would love to do or are curious about exploring. Decide if this is something you want to do alone, with family or friends. Busy is easy; find activities that give you joy, something you can be passionate about off the job.

SIGNAL WHEN WORK IS FINISHED

Maintain boundaries around your work. Identify activities that indicate the workday is over. For example, if you work at home, close the door and turn off your computer when you are finished for the day. If you commute, play music in your car, or immediately go for a walk when you get home. One of the great things about the human brain is that it responds to change: change context, change meaning.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE YOUR BEST INTERESTS AT HEART.

Invest in relationships with those who accept you for you are, will support you in honoring your values, doing things on your “absolute yes” list, and avoiding things on your “No” list.