



In-The-Know Monthly eNewsletter

## **Work / Life Balance**

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Published: June 2016

### **What is work/life balance? Does it exist and if it does how do we achieve it?**

Work/life balance is defined as the "the concept including proper prioritizing between work life and personal life". Remember the proverb "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy"? While this proverb is not new, the concept of work/life balance is relatively new. It became a concept when technology revolutionized the work place making it more accessible through the use of emails, computers and cell phones. As a result the lines between work life and personal life became easily blurred. Without a balance between achievement and enjoyment Jack indeed could become a dull boy. Imbalance affects relationships, health and life satisfaction. The work place is designed to get maximum effort out of its employees. However the new work/force, one that is dominated by Gen X'ers and Millennials, employers' lack of regard or respect for an employee's life outside of work has affected productivity and retention. As a result efforts to focus on the issue of work/life balance has increased. Balance solutions are being offered by companies to include telework, fewer structured work hours, and flexible work schedules. Defining clear goals for employees and giving them autonomy with time to "get it done" generates commitment. Compartmentalizing work and personal life is not possible for many. This highlights the need to look for solutions. Achieving work/life balance is a personal process. It depends on an employee's life stage, life's circumstances and personal perception of what the term means. There is not a "one size fits all" for balance. Life changes constantly; ongoing attention and evaluation to achieve balance is necessary. The fit for balance falls on the shoulders of each working individual. Here are some tips for work/life balance.

### **Communicate At Work**

Talk to your employer/supervisor about your balance needs. Identify options. Can you shorten your commute with later work hours? Can you telework, how often? Is flexibility with work hours possible? Does your job offer family leave or flex time? Start a conversation. You don't know what might be available if you don't ask. Support your requests with facts; research shows employees who have control of their schedules respond by investing greater effort. Productivity and job satisfaction increases; stress and work-family conflict decreases.

Change your perception about your role within your work community. View your position from a positive, powerful perspective; every worker plays a significant role. You are a valuable employee. If that is not your perspective adjust it, because you will only enjoy a level of respect based on the level of respect you have for yourself.

### **Prioritize**

What do you value? Make a list. Examples might include: Health, work/goals, family, friends, and leisure time. Draw a circle, represent your daily activity by dividing your time into pie slices. Are you satisfied with the level of attention you give to what you value? What daily tasks can be eliminated or adjusted? Be selective. Differentiate between what you believe you "should do"; focus instead on what you could do when you prioritize according to preference. Avoid phrases like: "I will do that as soon as I do this". Revise commitments; learn to say "no". Cut out those activities you dislike. Time is finite; being self-aware about how you use your time will allow you to adjust for efficiency. Discerning what is both important and urgent helps you avoid procrastination resulting in unnecessary stress. Stay focused on one task at a time; multi-tasking interrupts momentum. Regularly examine your priorities and make necessary changes.

### **Manage Your Time**

Be your own time boss. Making optimal use of your time requires delegating tasks. Develop a support system at work and at home; draw from sources when life becomes difficult. Give your family members jobs. Shared family responsibilities and focus on establishing routines creates stability and security. Be organized with lists and family calendars.

Life satisfaction comes through achievements. Designate time for goals both personal and professional. Have some fun; include activities you enjoy every day. Don't overlook the importance of rest and relaxation. Everyone needs "time-off". Place limits on technology; create boundaries between work and home. Monitor time spent on work emails. Let go of the need to "do it all". Let go of perfectionism and most importantly let go of guilt. Guilt is wasted emotional energy; it has the power to sabotage your efforts to balance your life.

Live life according to your own standards; establish limits and boundaries with others. Deciding what you are willing to do and choosing what behavior you will accept from others is necessary for balance.

Be flexible, life is unpredictable. Stuff happens to disrupt life, at times you will need to let go of control and negotiate for what is needed. Accepting "what is" helps you access "this too shall pass".

### **Self-care Is Key for Balance**

Exercise; move often, create steps. Carve out time at lunch. Stretch periodically at work. Take breaks every 90 minutes. Strive for 7 hours of sleep. Eat well, limit alcohol, caffeine, processed foods and sugar. Try yoga or meditation or prayer. Do whatever it takes to bring you a sense of well-being.

Practice mind-set intervention; frame stressors differently. Choose to view stress from a more positive position. Your body's stress reaction is asking you to respond differently to a troubling situation. This approach allows you to clearly see available options.

The "pursuit of happiness" is your American birthright. Ask yourself: "What would it take to make me feel happy?" Examine words/thoughts/beliefs that are contrary to that goal. Let go of the need to please, the need to be right, and the desire to do it all, have it all and to be validated by others. The ability to "let go" is powerful; it helps you to view transition and change and to treat it like a natural process.

Review the skills and strategies offered to help you strike a balance between work life and family life. Work-life balance is an ongoing process and it is different for everyone. You will need to review and adjust as your family, your interests and your work-life changes. Your job identity is only a fraction of who you are; make personal decisions about how you will combine career, relationships and self into an integrated whole. Use the skills and strategies that feel right for you to achieve your well-balanced life.

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