

Work-Life Balance in the Real World

Tips for living your life with a sense of peace and balance.

By Simma Lieberman



Almost any time I read an article or hear someone speak about life-work balance, the solution is the same—something along the lines of take a year off or take a long holiday and take your family with you.

A lot of people do not have the real time, budget, or desire to do these things. They may not have a “traditional family,” but have a family of friends, or are single people, single parents, or are taking care of their own parents. And no one wants to wait for a big trip to have a sense of peace and balance—we want this every day and in everything we do.

So if you are not taking a year off, retiring at 35, or ready to move to a quieter area, how can you live

your life so that you will have a sense of peace and balance?

Here are some suggestions:

Get rid of that old mantra that you have to do it alone.

No one achieves professional success without help from others. Think of the people who are your friends, family, and colleagues as your personal community and get over any reluctance to ask for help.

Have a community brainstorm session.

Invite some of these personal community members to your house, tell them that you are feeling overwhelmed,

tired, overworked, stressed, and out of balance. Ask them to share their own best practices and ideas about how to adapt a few to your life.

Let your community offer their resources.

When my partner of 18 years passed away and I became a single mother of an 8-year-old boy, I had no idea how I could continue speaking across the country, do what was necessary to run my business, and stay sane. Friends and colleagues came together and helped create a community for my son. People were willing to stay overnight and take him to activities while I was away or needed to attend meetings. My son gets to go to baseball games, to movies, and on trips and I get time to myself for reflection, exercise, and socializing with adults.

If you are feeling overwhelmed and overworked, ask people in your personal community to come and get you for lunch, coffee, or a movie. When they show up, make sure you go. The workaholic world will function without you for a few hours.

Become a better planner of work and personal time.

Improve your planning skills. Buy tickets in advance for events and go with other people so you won't cancel to catch up on paperwork. There is a perception that if people don't have a "family," they don't need to take time for themselves. Learn to be firm and say no to doing "favors" when you have other plans.

Be strategic about meeting attendance. Don't waste evenings or weekend time attending a meeting just because a colleague wants you to come along for the company.

Limit distractions that take unnecessary time.

Author and speaker Kate Berardo assesses what she can do by email rather than spending time on the phone. "Knowing how email can be a distraction, I open my emails, red flag those that need immediate attention, and save the rest for the end of the day. I used to answer everything in the morning thinking I would just get it out of the way, but I would find myself not even beginning important work until 4:00. . . ."

Integrate fun activities into work.

Set aside time to nurture relationships with people you like. Too many people eat their lunch at their desk or in their cars every day. Have lunch once a week with a colleague or friend who works near you. If you travel a lot, plan to visit someone you know who lives close to your destination or take some time to walk around. One benefit of cell phones is that we don't have to stay in our hotel rooms or in our office waiting for a call.

Check Your Vital Stress Stats

We can't always control our environment, but we can control our reaction to it. If environmental stressors influence you (they do most of us) practice the Control, Change, or Let Go process. Ask yourself these questions: Can I control it? Can I change it? If not, how can I let it go?

Keep a check on your stress levels by keeping a stress record. Rate your stress levels on a scale of 1-10 (1 being not stressed at all, 10 being stressed to the point of being dysfunctional or severely limited in terms of your activities). Jot down in a bulleted form:

- Date:
- Stress Rank:
- How I Feel:
- What's Going On:

This doesn't need to be a time-intensive activity. Spend just one minute each day writing on a small notepad you keep next to your bed or at your desk. After a few weeks, look back and try to identify patterns in your stress (computer crashes, certain professional events, interactions with certain individuals). Look for ways to eliminate stress by removing these stressors, and if that's not possible, look for opportunities to build in stress releasers, such as meditation, exercise, baths, or sleep-ins.

The point is to focus on your emotions and yourself for a few minutes each day. This type of self-reflective tool is a powerful way to fight off stress by helping you feel grounded and to restore calm in your daily life.

Once you've done this for a month or so, it can become a quick mental exercise and you can forego the pen and paper altogether. Like a vital stats check on your mental health, you can monitor your stress levels automatically and determine when you need a dose of a stress-relieving activity.



Don't schedule all of your meetings back to back. Make at least one meeting with yourself for at least an hour and get some air or just relax.

Know yourself.

Don't compare yourself to other people. Know what gives you a sense of peace and balance and what makes you feel off kilter. If you relax by reading, get books you enjoy and set aside time to spend reading.

Keep a notepad by your bed so you can write down those brilliant ideas that keep you awake all night. It will be easier to fall asleep once you write them down.

Wherever you go, bring yourself with you.

It doesn't make a difference if you are on a year-long cruise, relaxing at home, or playing golf—if you do not know how to create an internal sense of balance, you will feel the same as you always feel wherever you are.



Take a slow deep breath whenever you are feeling rushed and overwhelmed. It will help slow up that feeling of always being rushed and thinking about the next task while you're doing something else that needs your full attention.

Take a break from multi-tasking and try doing one thing at a time. It might feel strange, but you'll be calmer, more productive, and

strangely enough you'll get more done in less time.

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WHAT ENROLLMENT CHALLENGES DOES YOUR DISTRICT FACE?

- INCREASING ENROLLMENT
- DECLINING ENROLLMENT
- ATTENDANCE BOUNDARY CHANGES
- SCHOOL OVERCROWDING
- GRADE CONFIGURATION CHANGES
- SPECIAL PROGRAM PLACEMENT
- SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION
- CLASS SIZE REDUCTION
- FEEDER SCHOOL CHANGES
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