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THEME:

Achieving Balance



Understanding Life Balance and How It Impacts Your Vision

Time Tactics for the Electronic Age

Practical Solutions for Stress Management

How to Work and Live Simply

How to Seek out Mentors



Understanding Life Balance & How it Impacts Your Vision



BY STEVEN SWAFFORD

The computer system is down with another nasty virus, it's your day for the kids' car pool, and the challenging in-laws have decided to "show up" for dinner – just another day in the life of an association executive. It is days like this when you feel that juggling a chain saw, flaming sword, and a bowling ball would be more fun. Right? In today's 24/7 world, our ability to connect life balance with our life passions is difficult. No doubt.

In an article from the October 2004 issue of *Fast Company* magazine, "Balance is Bunk!" indicated that striving for balance was futile and we should all give up seeking our quest for such pipe dreams. While the article provided an interesting

perspective, it was a defeatist approach. It's tempting to scream Yes ... he is right! and give up. However we can take a purposeful and intentional approach that will guide healthy decision making to more balanced lives.

There is no need to pull out the white flag and embrace unbalanced and reactive lives. There are practical and purposeful steps an association executive or industry business partner can take to work toward balance while embracing our personal passions and visions. Part of that proactive process is to understand that individuals have four general areas that need engagement and development. These four areas of the balance model are the emotional, physical,

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Balance Model Personal Assessment

Rate your satisfaction level with the various aspects of your life on a scale of 0 (low) to 10 (high) to the questions below.

Emotional

- I spend time in meaningful relationships.
- I seek out positive relationships with others.
- I allow myself to experience the full range of my emotions.
- I express my emotions appropriately.
- I express myself authentically.
- I behave in ways that increase the potential for others to respect me.
- I do not let my emotions create turbulence in my life.
- If I'm in a bad mood, I do not take it out on others.
- I take responsibility for my own happiness.

Physical

- I get physical exercise on a regular basis (four to five days/week).
- I take proactive action to control my stress.
- I take time for relaxation and sleep.
- I have a healthy diet, specific to my own body's needs.
- I drink plenty of water.
- I limit my intake of caffeine.
- I limit my intake of sugar.
- I limit my intake of alcohol.
- I avoid my intake of tobacco and drugs.

Spiritual

- I take time for meditation, reflection, and/or prayer.
- I have a connection to my individual spirituality and/or formal faith tradition.
- I experience purpose and/or meaningfulness in my life.
- I express and/or experience gratitude frequently.
- I feel connected to others on my spiritual journey.
- I model the values that are important to me.
- I model the ethics that are important to me.
- I take time to nurture my spiritual development.

Intellectual

- I am committed to continuous learning and personal growth.
- I enjoy reading for professional development.
- I enjoy reading for personal retreat.
- I limit the amount of television that I watch.
- I express my creativity in many different forms/venues.
- I engage in both analytical (left brain) and creative (right brain) activities.
- I am aware of the belief and value systems that guide my behaviors.
- I encourage those around me to improve their professional development.

intellectual, and spiritual aspects of our lives. (see side bar for quick assessment)

There are a variety of tools and models that encourage balance in life. The key is to find a model and approach that works for you and connects to your values and beliefs. The important thing to remember is to find a model and/or approach that connects your personal goals with how you can work toward balance in your life. One approach in determining what approach will work best for you is to ask the question, “Do you have an action plan (written or mentally aware) for managing/balancing priorities which will be linked to your life’s passions and goals?”

From the book by R.J. Lee & S.N. King, *Discovering the Leader in You: A Guide to Realizing Your Personal Potential*, they highlight five areas for establishing a balanced approach to an individual’s passion and life. These five areas are visioning; refining; moderating; sequencing; and adding resources. While the article will address them in light of personal vision, the process is the same for an organization’s vision.

The first one is visioning, which is defined by Lee and King as identifying what you want and how to create the environ-

ment in which to achieve it. This is probably the most critical of all the steps as it defines how resources and energy is allocated. For example, if you want to achieve a higher educational degree, what steps in your environment do you need to take.

Next on the list is refining and this is about choosing what is important in your life and eliminating the nonessential. This very important next step is about choices and what will be a positive influence and what will be negative influences in achieving your goal. If going for that higher degree, then you need to ask what aspects will act as a catalyst in keeping you on track to achieve your vision and eliminate the barriers that are holding you back.

Do you remember the phrase “Do everything in moderation?” This connects with the third strategies for managing your priorities—moderating. The authors define this as setting the limits and energy you give to tasks and roles. Once you have determined your personal vision, it will be critical to determine boundaries. This connects directly to your ability to say “no” and be very selective in how you say “yes” on projects. The question needs to constantly be asked of how your decisions

contribute to the balance in your life and how it’s moving you toward your vision.

The fourth is sequencing and is important in how you pace your energy toward. A marathon runner is very tactical in how they approach a race. The strategy in each race is to understand the course/path and how to run the course that will optimize your strengths while diminish your weaknesses during the race. The marathon pacing reminds us to look at the big picture and don’t do everything at once.

Finally, once you’ve determined your vision; refined what’s important; moderated by setting limits on your time; you’ve sequenced your priorities; and now you are ready to add resources. The fifth element in this circular process of managing your priorities will target getting the right resources to make necessary changes to achieve your vision while being sensitive to keeping balance in your life.

Understanding the life balance and prioritization process are essential steps to getting started on your journey. Ask yourself the important first question of “What are your desired balance goals?” This is connected to understanding what is “in” balance and what is “out of” balance in



Cool Balance-related Magazines

Body + Soul magazine— published by Martha Stewart Living

Body & Soul magazine—formerly the *New Age Journal*

Fast Company magazine—selected articles on life/work issues; also check out the archives part of their website www.fastcompany.com

Interesting Balance-related Articles

Creating a Work/Life Balance

www-8.ibm.com/au/diversity/creating_work_life_balance.html

Tips for Achieving a Balance at Work and Personal Life

www.family-institute.org/therapy/tips/6worklifetips.htm

10 Tips for a Balance Life

www.bodybuildingforyou.com/articles-submit/ghf/10-tips-balance-life.htm

your life. The next question is “What are the most direct actions you could take to achieve those balance goals?” This might be fun to do for your spouse or partner so you engage those around you in the process, since they will be significantly affected by this process. The third question is “What are you willing to do immediately to achieve those goals?”

If you remember one process from this article, it’s this – evaluate your current situation; set a goal to move toward your desired state; and celebrate your progress along the way. Most individuals do the first two without any problem, but many times we forget to reward and encourage ourselves on our journey.

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