

Achieving a Work Life Balance

Key Points

- » You can avoid stress, disappointments and burnout by working towards 'work life balance'
- » A key step towards achieving work life balance is to have a clear sense of the ways in which you spend your time
- » Achieving balance involves rewarding yourself for your hard work by spending time with loved ones and friends, engaging in a variety of activities and hobbies and getting plenty of rest

"Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them – work, family, health, friends and spirit and you're keeping all of these in the air. You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls – family, health, friends, and spirit – are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged, or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life," Brian Dyson, former vice chairman and COO of Coca-Cola.

Achieving a balance between demands on your time isn't easy – every day our attention and efforts are pulled between competing deadlines and priorities at work and home.

This constant push/ pull between our commitments and priorities can lead to stresses, missed deadlines, disappointments and burnout. The best way to avoid these is to strive towards creating 'work life balance': an equilibrium between our competing demands. Let's look at 10 ways to help you to achieve this:

Complete an audit of your time

Before you can begin to restore some balance between your work and life commitments, you will need a clearer picture of how you are spending your time.

The idea of 'auditing' your time might be as appealing as listening to someone scrape their fingernails down a blackboard, but the task itself doesn't need to be over complicated. You can start with a note taking app (like Evernote, Apple Notes or Google Keep) or a paper notepad/ diary and write down the total amount of time that you spend on activities before you start your work day, on commuting, exercising, getting ready, on completing work tasks, taking breaks, participating in after work activities, on watching TV, shopping (grocery and other) and actual time spent resting/sleeping.

When you have completed your audit you can look over the results and identify how much time you are actually spending doing each activity. Having a clearer idea of how you spend your time helps to plan your work and recreational activities to meet the unique challenges of your lifestyle.

This activity will also help you to identify tasks or activities that take up significant amounts of time for little reward – you can then decide if you want to continue these activities or find a way to eliminate them or even outsource them to free up some of your time.

Get some organisational time into your morning routine

In the morning, after you have slept and your brain is refreshed, is the best time to plan your day. Again this might seem overwhelming to think about or it might appear to be a difficult task once you begin, but as time goes on this behaviour will become a second nature habit.

Here's how you can get this done:

- » At the beginning of each day/shift, set aside some time (10-15 minutes) to write a list of things to do or to look over the tasks on your existing To Do list
- » Your list should include a mix of work and life activities or tasks that you want to get done on this day
- » To help balance your list you should also include fun, recreational or 'time out' activities as rewards that you can 'check off' after completing tasks



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Get some rest

Something else to include on your To Do list is scheduled rest. Use this time to wind down and let go of stress. You might want to do this at lunchtime while at work or just before bed to help you to have a more refreshing night's sleep.

Wind down time should involve turning off your phone and/ or other electronic devices like laptops and tablets; this also means calling 'time' on checking your emails or social media feeds.

Taking these actions at home is especially important if your work life is hectic: the arrival of laptops, smartphones and tablets has made it harder to 'switch off' from work – there is no work life balance if every moment involves working or having work on your mind.

Relationships matter

Connecting with loved ones, family and friends is an excellent way to switch off from work and focus on life – making time to do this is central to your mental health and wellbeing.

Ensure that you are seeing your loved ones, family and friends – and not only on the weekends, but in the evening after work too. At the end of your work day, instead of spending time with your smartphone, really connect and hear the stories of those people that you care about. You could make a date with your significant other, call a friend and have a coffee, or take your child (or younger cousin, nephew or niece) to the park or to the movies.

When you are out together, take the time to ask about their day or week or month or perhaps offer to help in some area of their life. Being a part of their life will help you to stay emotionally connected and healthy. Helping others can also be rewarding and boost your self esteem.

Make a date with yourself

Spending time with ourselves is important too - it's a way to reward ourselves for working hard, achieving goals or mastering a new challenge. When you do get time alone, it's your chance to do something you love: like going to the gym; getting a massage; reading a magazine or favourite book; cooking a delicious meal; or watching a favourite TV show or movie. Making time for yourself will help you to recharge and turn up tomorrow to do it all again.

Breathe some fresh air

Breaking up your day with a walk to take in the sights and some fresh air is an enjoyable way to bring some balance to your day. Most of us spend a lot of our days (at work or at home) indoors. Taking a walk at lunchtime, getting off the tram or train or bus one stop early or walking home from the park a different way can really boost your inquisitiveness and your self esteem.

Change it up a bit

Walking a different route isn't the only way to try something new. Consider picking up a new hobby or interest; maybe you could join a local theatre group; spend time looking through a craft market; find your camera and take some photographs; or go along to a local sports match. Having variety in your life keeps things interesting and gives you events or highlights to look forward to during the working week.

Finding work life balance is a challenge that we all face. It is important for our health and wellbeing that we balance out our hectic work lives with time spent with friends and loved ones, as well as spending time alone for reflection and relaxation.

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