

Balancing the Scales

If you're like most people you are probably working harder and longer than you used to. As a result, finding balance in today's fast-paced world is more difficult than ever before. Yet, a healthy balance has also never been more important. Here are a few strategies that can help:

1. First and foremost, you must love what you do. We spend over a third of our life at work – doesn't it make sense to enjoy it? I learned many years ago that the more you enjoy your job or work the more successful you will be. Even a high-pressure job is less stressful when you fully enjoy it. I know several people who have high-profile and high-pressure careers but they still maintain a sense of balance because they love their business. Enjoying your work gives you more satisfaction and personal fulfillment.

If you find yourself in a job that doesn't motivate or stimulate you, consider making a change. There are lots of great books on the market that can help you discover what type of work you are best suited for.

2. Make time for family and friends. Regardless how busy you are it is critical to spend time with people who are close to you. In the last several years my wife and I make sure to schedule a 'date night' once a week. This usually means having dinner at a local restaurant or going to a movie, show, or concert. Although we often talk about our business it gives us the opportunity to catch up and discuss things we don't always find time to talk about during the rest of the week. Spending time with friends is also a great way to recharge mentally, particularly if your friends are not employed in the same industry.
3. Find a hobby. I think it is important to engage yourself in a pastime or hobby because they help you forget about work for a while. My two favourite pastimes are reading and running. In addition to releasing stress, this 'escape' helps recharge your batteries and maintain your objectivity. Plus, a clear energized mind is more creative and open to accepting new ideas.
4. Schedule "me" time. As selfish as it sounds we all need a few hours of personal time. I usually schedule this when my wife is out running errands. Most of the time I'll read, watch a movie, or sometimes take a nap. I don't feel guilty for taking this time to myself because it actually helps my marriage by allowing me to engage in something I fully enjoy without worrying about distractions from other people. One word of caution, "Me" time should not be scheduled at the sacrifice of others or occupy a large portion of your schedule. If you have been on a business trip for a week it's not fair to your family to schedule the entire weekend as "me" time.
5. Take vacations. Vacations are critical to your well-being. It is essential to take a break from the hectic and fast-paced business world. Too many people in business wave their lack of vacation time as a badge of honour but I feel that a lack of a break from the business negatively affects your ability to perform at your maximum potential. When I started my business, I set a goal of taking a one-week break at least three times a year. I adhered to this goal in the first three years because I made sure to plan my breaks early in the year. Then in my fourth year I neglected to plan this time off. Before I knew it, October had rolled around and I still hadn't taken any time off. By this time, I was feeling burned out, I experienced more stress, and I had less energy, drive and motivation.
6. Disconnect yourself. Today's technology has made it very difficult for us to completely disconnect from business. I find that I am drawn to email on the weekends and even on vacations. We don't want to miss anything and sometimes our boss even requires that we stay connected to the office on our time off. However, I strongly believe that disconnecting

yourself completely from voice mail, email, your PDA and BlackBerry is essential to creating some semblance of balance in our lives. There is no question that you will have more work to catch up on when you return to work but this complete break helps your brain recharge.

I won't suggest that creating this balance is easy – it's not. However, with a bit of focus and attention you can start to balance the scales. It's worth the effort.

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