



Making Life Easier
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Balancing Work/Life Is a Two-way Street

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There's been a lot of talk lately about what companies are doing to be more "family friendly." What seems obvious but has garnered much less attention, is the important role that the individual employee plays. Achieving a work/life balance is a two-way street.

Research underscores the critical value of the employee in finding a work/life balance. The results of a *Business Week* survey ranking the "best companies for work and family" showed that in companies that came out on top of the list, employees gave high marks for:

- supportive bosses
- the ability to work flexibly to meet personal obligations
- senior management that truly "got it"

Scores plummeted, however, when the questions focused on the employees rather than on the company. When asked how they felt about their own work/family balance, employees that had just raved about their company didn't feel so hot.

Unless you do some personal soul-searching and prioritizing, you'll have a hard time attaining balance even at a great company.

What does balance mean to you?

Everyone must define balance individually. One person may work 60 hours or more a week and still find time to enjoy life outside work. Others may work only part-time, but because of issues such as job stress, burnout or caregiving, for example, they find that even limiting their hours doesn't make them feel better about their own work/family situation.

Look inward

"What is your vision of the good life?" This is the ultimate question, according to Richard Leider, author of *The Power of Purpose*. Leider suggests that individuals need to connect with the creative spirit of life, know and express their gifts and talents and know that their life matters; that they'll leave something behind. Picture yourself as a senior citizen. How would you evaluate your life?

"If anything were possible, what would really light you up?" asks Gail Blanke, founder of Life

Designs, a company that formally trains individuals to craft personal plans. Begin with thinking about your "life plan in terms of purpose and passion."

Think of yourself as a whole person

It may be useful to think of yourself as a 24-hour person, in terms of your whole day. Try these strategies to help strike a work/life balance:

- Experiment with work strategies such as flexible work strategies.
- If you work extra jobs or heavy overtime for pay, reassess your hours. Do you really need the money?
- If you participate in lots of activities, such as clubs or sports, in addition to work and family responsibilities, reconsider. Are they really important? What do you get out of them? Can you cut something?
- Think about the kind of family you want to be and how to get there. In his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*, Stephen Covey writes, "Good families—even great families—are off track 90 percent of the time! The key is that they have a sense of destination. They know what the "track" looks like. And they keep coming back to it time and time again."
- If you are single, establish relationships and activities that provide you with companionship and a sense of caring. Look to the church and the community for groups to join. Volunteer or participate in sports, hobbies or other activities.

Create a personal mission statement

Companies create mission statements stating their key objectives and how they plan to achieve those objectives. It may prove helpful for individuals to do the same. Start with these steps and actually write out a personal statement.

But no matter how or where you begin the process, the message to today's workers is clear: Take the initiative to figure out what you really want out of work and life.

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