

Work-Life Balance in 3 Easy Steps

MAINTAINING WORK-LIFE BALANCE can feel like its own full-time job—and while it does take continual effort, the rewards make it more than worthwhile. Consider the alternative: letting someone or something else order your life, and hoping their plans for you are as fulfilling as those you could fashion on your own.

“Taking responsibility for my happiness is empowering. It places my life back in my own hands. Ahead of taking this responsibility, I may imagine it will be a burden. What I discover is that it sets me free.”

Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*

The key is to take stock of both your personal and professional life, since the two support each other—career satisfaction drives personal happiness, and how well things are going in your personal life can greatly affect how you see your work.

The 3 Steps

1. Figure out what you need, both on the job and off, to feel fulfilled. How would your life look if you had more time for the things you valued most? How would your mood improve on the job? Now think about how you would feel without these things.

To help with this step, please see the last page in this document, “20 Nonnegotiable Elements of My Life.” Why twenty? Often it takes that many answers to get to the heart of what we value most. To get the most from this exercise:

- Find a quiet place where you won’t be distracted.
- Resist the urge to overthink your answers. Use a timer, if necessary, to force yourself to write fast and not overanalyze.
- Remember, this is your list and your life—include anything and everything you want: big things, little things, even quirky things. This is not a time to judge your answers or cut back your ideal. In the words of a professional negotiator, “Ask for what you want, not what you think you’ll get.”

Once you have your list, take time regularly to review and fine-tune it.

2. Identify what you’re willing to give up.

Take another look at your 20 Nonnegotiable Elements. In light of these important parts of your life, which activities (outside this list) are you willing to reduce or eliminate?

For example, most of us find we spend too much time online or in front of the TV. You may also find you’re investing energy in other areas that no longer serve your highest priorities. This is not a case for abandoning your family, for example, but simply re-evaluating those activities (such as serving on a committee) that may not be the best use of your time.

Dot down your initial thoughts for what you might be willing to give up:



3. Choose two items from your Nonnegotiable list, and build them into the upcoming week.

Even if it'll take you longer than a week to complete them, you can at least get started. For example, if one of your Nonnegotiable Elements is an annual ski trip, why not set aside 30 minutes this week to start planning it?

Over time, you'll discover more and more ways to incorporate your Nonnegotiable Elements into your life—you may even find most of them are more realistic than you first realized.

“The key is not to prioritize what’s on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.”

Stephen R. Covey, *First Things First*

Conclusion

None of us can have perfect work-life balance all the time. Big projects come up, crises at home or at the office force us to set aside other agendas. But we have much more control than we think, if only we take

time to identify our top priorities, and do what's within our power to incorporate them into our lives.

Recommended Reading

First Things First by Stephen Covey, Rebecca R. Merrill and A. Roger Merrill (Simon & Schuster).

“Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time” by Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy, *Harvard Business Review* (October 2007, Reprint R0710B).

When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough by Harold S. Kushner (Fireside).

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20 Nonnegotiable Elements of My Life

*“When you realize you do not have time for everything, when you find out that trying to cram everything into a twenty-four-hour day leaves you tired, leaves the things you do incomplete and half-baked, and leaves the people you share life with feeling that you never stop moving long enough for them to get to know you, **what are the nonnegotiable elements of your life? What are the things you absolutely must have and do so that you can feel that you have lived your life and not wasted it?**”*

Harold Kushner, *When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough* (ISBN 0-7432-3473-1)

Take a few moments to write your personal list. Be sure to include the “little” things that may not matter to anyone else but you! The more specific you are, the more helpful this exercise will be. Your answers often reveal what you need to be happy and fulfilled, so refer to your list often, particularly when scheduling your time.

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