



WORK / LIFE BALANCE

IT IS ACHIEVABLE!

Work/life balance is one of the most elusive and sought-after values in business today. In a recent Aon

Consulting poll, **88 percent of employees say they have a hard time juggling work and life.**

Employers recognize that out-of-balance or burned-out employees can impact morale, engagement, attendance, productivity, retention, quality and even customer satisfaction, so the stakes are high. With so much at stake, why has work/life balance been so hard to figure out?

The problem is that balance is not something that can be provided as part of a benefits package. One organization can't offer more work/

life balance to its employees than another. Some employers offer a flexible work schedule, child care, financial services, etc. But these things can only help you manage life more efficiently, they can't give your life direction, momentum or the feeling of balance.

Despite recognizing the problem, surveys show that employees have

WHEN AND WHERE

Steve McClatchy, president of Alleeer Training & Consulting, will show attendees how to "Work Smarter, Reduce Stress and Get More Done" on **Sunday, Nov. 8** from **1:00 - 2:30 p.m.** and again from **3:00 - 4:30 p.m.**

been driven further away from achieving work/life balance over the last several years by being pounded consistently with messages like "eight percent unemployment," "if we can just survive this economy," and "doing more with less." Each of us has been forced to value simply having a job, regardless of how much stress we are under.



MCCLATCHY

Many people have had to take on more responsibility and more tasks just to stay where they are in their careers. Each day has become a race to complete our to-do list and "meet expectations." That is not seeking balance, that is seeking survival. But staying in this survival

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THE BEST WAY TO COMBAT BURN-OUT AND STRESS AND ACHIEVE A FEELING THAT YOUR LIFE IS BALANCED . . . IS TO CONTINUOUSLY SEEK IMPROVEMENT IN SOME AREA OF YOUR LIFE.

mode for too long without moving forward or making progress in life is what leads to burn-out.

The term "work/life balance" suggests that *work* is what we *have* to do and *life* is what we *want* to do, and that we must constantly choose between these opposing forces. It suggests that when we choose to give time or thought to one, the other loses. But you don't have a separate professional life and personal life — you just have a life.

This dichotomy leads people to say things like they want to work really hard and retire at 50 and have the rest of their lives to do what they want. Would that produce balance? Would it be wise to wait until your life is half over before you start living it? Would your spouse or friends even wait around that long to enjoy it with you?

Trying to manage the clock on an everyday basis doesn't guarantee balance either. Spending half of each day in the office and half at home can't guarantee that you would leave stress behind when you left work for the day. It can't guarantee that you would have satisfying personal relationships just because of the number of hours spent outside the office or because you turn your smartphone off during dinner. Balance is not a quantitative measure.

Think of the last time you had the thought that your life is better today than it was yesterday. Maybe it was a graduation, a new job or promotion, a new client, an award, a magazine or TV appearance, a great vacation, running a marathon, a new relationship, a new volunteer opportunity, helping a child with a new milestone or even just receiving a compliment on a job well done. These are times

when you felt balanced. You worked toward a goal and your hard work produced real results and made an improvement in your life.

Movement in our lives toward goals and improvement is what creates balance. It creates the excitement and adrenaline that we need to keep going. It offers peace of mind that we have not wasted time, that we have identified where we want to go and we have done something about it instead of just standing still and aging another day. The momentum created by improvement and results motivates and inspires us to do more the next day.

This is a different understanding of balance. **Balance is a feeling you get when you are satisfied with where you are and where you are going in life.** You are satisfied with where you're spending your time and resources. Balance comes from pursuing and achieving goals and seeing improvement in your life, rather than continuing to put forth effort toward maintenance or standing still.

88 PERCENT OF EMPLOYEES SAY THEY HAVE A HARD TIME JUGGLING WORK & LIFE

The balance and satisfaction that come from pursuing goals and improvement is unique to each individual. What makes one person's life better might not be what you want. One person may want to buy a bigger house; you might want to finally downsize. It's not always bigger, better or more; it's about movement — about taking your life in the direction you want it to go and experiencing the excitement and exhilaration that goes with it.

Both personally and professionally, you have opportunity for improvement, ingenuity, new adventure and growth. The best way to combat burn-out and stress and achieve a feeling that your life is balanced between what you have to do and what makes you feel alive, is to continuously seek improvement in some area of your life.

This is important because there are parts of life that continue to get worse all the time. The reality of aging is that health becomes more challenging and maintaining physical appearance becomes more time consuming. The responsibilities and worries of life never stop; in fact, they seem to grow as we get older.

Without continuous effort toward goals and progress, you will spend all your time and tremendous effort on maintenance and just trying to stay where you are and not lose ground. Over time, this can cause burn-out, depression, resentment, regret and stress.

As you identify goals and plan even small steps to work toward them each day, the feeling of burn-out begins to fade. With each small step you see improvement and gain momentum. You are moving, progressing, and the purpose of your efforts becomes more evident. You have something to talk about and develop ideas about, your thoughts gravitate toward how to reach the goal, and how your life will improve once you have accomplished it.

That feeling of life in motion is creating balance. Moving toward something meaningful that will make life better for you, your team at work, your organization or your family is what makes burn-out and stress fade away and lets balance and satisfaction move in.

ONE SMALL STEP

The key to getting started is to plan. Managing survival or maintenance items is challenging and time consuming. The daily maintenance tasks that cause burn-out include paying bills, doing dishes, getting haircuts, putting gas in the car, submitting expense reports, attending long meetings and keeping up with endless emails. Then you wake up the next day and do it all over again. If you wait until these items are completed each day before you get to improvement, then improvement will never happen.

Instead, while you are in the midst of frenzied errands and tasks, take a step back and shift gears a little. Squeeze in steps toward your goals on your calendar every day. Without planning these steps, your brain will always prioritize survival tasks first. A written plan influences the way you make decisions about your time and helps you fit in goal steps along with everything else you have to do today. It will keep your goals at the front of your mind instead of letting you bury yourself in survival mode.

Take some time and make a list of goals, large and small, that would improve the quality of your life. Consider professional and personal goals, long- and short-term. Look at the list every day and find a way to get some small step toward achieving one of them onto your calendar each day. Schedule time to make a networking call, read an industry magazine, take a class, brainstorm ways to improve a process or offer more value to a client. Contact a financial planner, exercise, plan a date, play a game, fix that squeaky door.

Movement toward goals and improvement, even small steps, can keep you from burn-out and will keep you balanced and improve the quality of not just your professional life or

your personal life, but your whole life. We don't need to balance work and life. Work is part of life. We need to balance surviving today with progressing toward a better tomorrow.

This is what truly creates the feeling of balance and it's not something

that can be given to you by an employer or achieved by watching how much time you spend working versus not working. If you can identify ways in which you are improving an area of your life all the time (no matter how small) then you have a credible claim to balance. **CS**



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