

Balancing Your Career and Personal Life

By Jill Cascarano

Today's Fast-Paced World

On more than one occasion, you've probably heard yourself muttering that old adage "There are just not enough hours in the day!" Between your thriving career, incredible technology, caring for and enjoying your family, the endless barrage of activities, errands, and commitments, it's a constant balancing act. Today's world is vibrant and inspiring but also more demanding of your time.

Superwoman Doesn't Exist

According to the Families and Work Institute, both sexes feel the stress of balancing career and personal life. However, women still put a much larger amount of pressure on themselves to try and do everything. Many give in to feelings of guilt and compare themselves to their female counterparts who they perceive as "superwoman". Kick that unrealistic notion to the curb.

Achieve Better Work-Life Balance

As long as you're working, juggling a career and personal life will probably be constant. The great news is that improved work-life balance is within your reach! Start by examining your job relationship. Then apply empowering, customized strategies to help you maintain more work-life balance.

Wedded to Your Job? Ponder the Effects

It can become addicting to work long hours at the office, especially if you're trying to land a promotion, handle an ever-increasing workload, or just keep your head above water. However, if you're spending most of your time working, your personal life is bound to suffer. Over time, poor work-life balance may contribute to chronic fatigue and stress, burnout, lost time with family and friends, or feelings of depression and anxiety.

Use Your Career Strategies

Although you can't just snap your fingers and magically create more hours in a day, you CAN bring more balance into your life by tapping into career skills, such as planning, organizing, communicating, collaborating, delegating, and setting limits.

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Consider some of these suggestions:

- Track your actions. Pay attention to your daily tasks, including work-related and personal activities. Decide what's necessary and what satisfies you the most.
- Manage your time. Cut or delegate activities that you can't handle. You may want to share your concerns and possible solutions with your manager or family members depending on the situation. Organize household tasks efficiently, such as running errands in batches or doing only one load of laundry each day instead of all of it. Do what needs to be done in the moment, and let the rest wait.
- Make a list. Jot down family events, meetings, birthdays, and appointments on a monthly calendar. Keep a daily "must-do" list at work and home. You'll feel more organized.
- Learn to say no. Whether it's a co-worker asking you to lead an extra project or your child's teacher asking you to organize a class party, remember that it's OK to respectfully say no. When you stop accepting every task or request out of a sense of guilt or obligation, you'll have more time for activities that are meaningful to you.
- Leave work at work. Because of technology, you may feel pressured to stay in constant communication, but try to create a boundary between work and home time. You'll feel more relaxed and be fully present.

- Reduce email and phone access. Try to check emails only three times a day, such as mid-morning, early afternoon, and late in the day. The goal is to stop getting caught up in every email that takes away from your important work items. The same holds true for phone calls. If you need to complete an urgent project, let calls go to voice-mail. Check your messages at set intervals.

- Manage your personal phone. Put your personal phone ringer on silent as another means to avoid unnecessary interruption during critical periods at work or when enjoying precious time with family.

- Limit social media. Shut down applications, such as Facebook and Twitter, to stop the temptation to regularly check status updates. If spending time on social media is not moving you forward and further restricting your time, then leave it be. You can catch up later.

- Delegate tasks. Do this both at the office and on the home front. Asking for help can save you time and teach another individual the value of being a team player.

- Take advantage of options. See if your employer offers flex hours, a compressed workweek, job sharing, telecommuting, etc. If you have the opportunity to utilize such options, go for it.

- Create privacy. Shut your office door or designate a quiet home space during "crunch times".

- Set a timer. This will help cut down on procrastination. Start by setting your timer for just 15-minute increments to make tasks seem more manageable. Extend the time as you progress.

Care for Yourself

A healthy lifestyle is essential to coping with stress and achieving more work-life balance. Aim to:

- Eat healthier. Enjoy more fresh fruits, vegetables, fish, and lean protein. Cut back on refined sugar, such as cookies, cakes, and pastries. Limit your caffeine and soda intake. Drink plenty of water. Don't starve!

- Get enough sleep. Try to get at least 7 hours of sleep a day. Lack of sleep can cause chronic fatigue, stress, and irritability. Avoid using personal electronic devices, such as smart phones and tablets, just before bedtime as these can stimulate your brain making it harder to fall asleep.

- Make time for fun, relaxation, and exercise. Set aside time each day for an activity that you enjoy, such as reading, drawing, creative writing, brisk walking, lifting weights, yoga, and listening to music. Discover activities you can do with family or friends, such as hiking, golfing, bike riding, tennis, dancing, or taking healthy cooking classes.

- Enhance your support system. At work, collaborate and cross train with trusted co-workers so if a family situation arises that person can help cover for you and vice versa. At home, ask trusted family members, friends, or neighbors to assist with children, pets, and/or household duties when you must work overtime or travel. Communicate and coordinate with your spouse or partner to keep things running smoothly.

Check Your Priorities

Creating work-life balance is a continuous process as your family, interests, and work life change. Periodically review your priorities. Routinely take stock of how you're feeling emotionally and physically. Make adjustments, as needed, to keep yourself on track.

Jill has always had a passion for both writing and well-being. She has an extensive professional background developing and implementing employer health and wellness programs and writing employee health communications. She possesses an M.A. in Human Resources Management and a B.A. in Communications. She's currently a student in the Health Coach Training Program at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. Jill can be reached at: JillCascarano16@comcast.net.