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FIRM MANAGEMENT

Whistle While You Work

Tips for Finding Balance in Our Overbooked Lives

Tom Ellsworth • Jun. 01, 2009

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Six days out of seven they hurried off to work. Toting their specialized tools and equipment, the men were visibly energized by their careers. They always left before dawn and never returned until the last rays of the sun had sleepily disappeared behind the surrounding hills. There were seven in all — men who were totally preoccupied with their jobs. Rumor has it they even whistled while they worked!

Then tragedy struck. Late one afternoon, when the men were still at work (where else!), the lady of the house was poisoned by a beauty-challenged jealous neighbor. The men were stunned; they never saw this coming. The whistling stopped. Work no longer mattered. If only they had been more balanced in their lives, Miss White might not have bitten off more than she could chew ... okay, perhaps “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” is a stretch, but the issue of balance in our lives is no fairy tale.

While it is true that no one in the real world lives happily ever after, we can live much more happily with a balanced approach to life. Sometimes it is easy to detect when the scales tip too heavily in one direction. For instance, your body will definitely let you know when it is unbalanced. I rediscovered that truth while on a short-term house-building mission trip to Mexico.

All workers were warned of the dangers of dehydration in the hot sun. Every few minutes, supervisors encouraged us to drink more water. So I did. I didn't particularly feel parched, but who was I to question those who worked in this intense heat all the time?

By late afternoon, I was sick to my stomach — not from dehydration but from too much water! My body was out of balance, and it let me know in a most unpleasant way. In the days that followed, I trusted my body to “tell me” when it needed fluids, and I had no more problems.

I like what Dr. Richard Swenson wrote in his book, *Margin*:

“Veritable factories that never shut down, our bodies exhibit a complexity beyond human comprehension. We each are made up of trillions upon trillions of working units, all perpetually moving, metabolizing, combining, interacting, adjusting, purifying, purging, building and decaying. Yet everything must function in balance. If this balance is disturbed, disease is the result. We get sick. We feel pain.”

Most people I know want to avoid physical pain at all cost, so keeping the body in balance is a priority. Unfortunately, physical stability isn't our greatest challenge. We must also learn to balance work, marriage, parental responsibilities, social commitments, community involvement, leisure activities and personal restoration. Such a balance faces several formidable foes.

Foe #1: Career Advancement

Early in our careers, we tend to be consumed with climbing the proverbial corporate ladder. Men especially draw much of their self-worth from their labor. The more time and energy we invest, the better we feel about ourselves. Getting to the top becomes our driving force and overriding motivation.

However, when we put our career in overdrive and leave balance in the dust, we set ourselves up for a huge disappointment. When personal health and familial needs are neglected in the process, arriving at the top alone and sickly is a hollow victory. Reaching the top of that ladder won't mean much if the rest of your life is in shambles below the bottom rung.

Set realistic career goals. Whether you are a sole practitioner or part of a large tax and accounting firm, remember there are a limited number of hours in a day — 24 to be exact. Your body will rebel if you don't dedicate some of those for sleep; your family will rebel if you don't dedicate some for family time. You cannot fit an unlimited number of tax returns into a limited number of hours. Doesn't Murphy have a law against that? When you spread your accounting expertise too thin, your business and your clients will suffer. Most of all, you will suffer!

Move up that ladder at a balanced pace because your career is only one of several important priorities. Remember, no job can ever take the place of a valued relationship.

The important people in our lives will still be there when that all-consuming job is nothing but a distant memory.

Foe #2: Material Accumulation

The quest for “things” often robs us of the more important values of a balanced life. The American Revolutionaries were greatly influenced by the writings of seventeenth century English philosopher, John Locke, who coined the phrase, “life, liberty and the pursuit of property.” Thomas Jefferson tweaked that ideal and immortalized it in the Declaration of Independence as, “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” I like Jefferson's version better. Our twenty-first century thirst for property or things often robs us of our happiness. Contentment only follows attainment in the dictionary.

If you are tempted to grow your accounting business at a break neck speed, don't be surprised if you become a pain in the neck. The desire to acquire at any cost never takes into account the fact that unrestrained growth leaves you no time to enjoy more things. An increase in business can be good when the motive is right and the growth is balanced. Anything less makes the pursuit of happiness elusive.

I heard this bit of wisdom a long time ago, and it has proven true time and again: “Some love people and use things; others love things and use people. Only one course leads to contentment.” The pursuit of happiness is fulfilled in what we give to others, not what we get.

Foe #3: Over-Scheduled Calendar

A daily planning calendar is a valuable tool, but for too many of us it is frightfully unbalanced. Whether you use a pencil, stylus or keyboard to record your daily

commitments, it is likely that your life is dictated by a highly scheduled calendar. Our lives are overbooked! For many, a 40-hour-work-week would seem like a vacation.

But that's not all. Husbands and wives, like ships passing in the night, cart kids from one activity to another.

Add to work and family schedules an active social agenda, and you will push the pressure valve needle far past the red line. Please remember that you cannot do everything so wisely choose what is most valuable for your family, your friends and your career. You don't have to keep up with anyone, even if his name is Jones. Schedule some R & R for you and your family. Restore the balance; your body, mind and soul will be grateful you did.

This is where the wise use of technology can make a real difference. Check out some of the newer accounting software that's available; don't let down on the upgrades. Find one that suits your company's size and situation. If the software company offers a training seminar, take time to attend.

You'll be amazed how valuable that product becomes when you know how to use it properly. Perhaps the greatest value of a training seminar is the encouragement that comes from being with others who are also trying to stay ahead of the learning curve. Misery isn't the only state that loves company! Who knows? Your new tech buddies may be as valuable as that software bundle.

When we consider how these foes rail against the fortress of balance, it's no wonder our battle-weary lives are exhausted. And in that exhausted state, those around us will quickly pick up on the fact that we have become sleepy, bashful, sneezy, grumpy or just a bit dopey. If you aren't careful, these foes will slip you a poison apple and keep you from living happily ever after. The balanced life really is the contented life. And who knows, when balance returns to your daily routines, you, too, may whistle while you work!

See the other 2 articles in this series:

[How to Maintain Your Equilibrium](#)

[Good Work/Life Balance Comes From Good Workflow](#)

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