



## My Work/Life Balance Lessons

By Jacalyn Costigan

If it weren't for my teenage niece's visit, I might have become the Seattle business unit's poster child for work/life imbalance.

Paige spent a summer vacation with me eight years ago, interning at Amazon.com during the day and waiting too long for me to come home at night.

When she confronted me about my workaholic tendencies and our lack of time together, I realized that I needed to do things differently – not just for her, but for myself. I started leaving work earlier – at 5:30 or 6 p.m. – and working less on weekends. The world didn't end when I left early and I actually felt more energized because I was taking more time for myself. Adding a regular exercise routine to my weekly schedule made a big difference in my stress level, too. My partner and I even got a dog!

This change in perspective about my own work habits coincided with my realization that if we didn't address work/life balance issues in our office, we'd have difficulty retaining people. Over time, we have instituted a few changes that have had a positive impact on morale for all of us. They include:

- Hosting quarterly off-site staff events, such as a scavenger hunt or an eagle watching trip on the Skagit River, which allow us to get to know each other better outside the office setting.
- Improved communication about the business unit's goals and strategies so that people have a better sense of how they fit into the unit's success.
- Monthly staff meetings where we share information about the special projects division and celebrate personal milestones – a new baby or a successful marathon run.
- Group participation in community relations activities such as the upcoming two-day MS 150 Bike Tour, where we have 25 riders raising \$25,000 for multiple sclerosis research.
- Being selective about our clients and projects in a way that is more profitable for the company and contributes to greater employee satisfaction with the client experience – and vice versa.
- Hiring more interns so staff has increased support, which helps with productivity.

There's more we can and will do but we've seen

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## Becoming an Enjoyment Expert

Enjoying life is a learned behavior. Most of us recognize that we develop our ability to achieve in life through education, observation and practice. What many of us miss is that the ability to fully Enjoy life is also a learned skill. The more we develop our enjoyment skills, the happier and more fulfilling every part of our life becomes. Here's how you can grow those skills and become an Enjoyment Expert. (Reading time 180 seconds)

Several years ago a John Stossel special on ABC summarized a large body of empirical research on happiness. One of the findings was that 71% of American parents rated "A Happy Life" as their first choice of the goals they would want for their children. In second place was a successful career at 12%.

My guess is that most people around the world want both for their children and themselves... a happy life and a professionally rewarding job.

On the achievement side, you personally have benefited from the tens of billions of dollars invested annually in education and mentoring to improve your productivity and earning skills. But what has been your training on living a happy life?

"A Happy Life" means more to us than just "Ha-Ha" happiness. We also mean love, fulfillment, celebration plus the many emotions derived from achievement, such as pride, satisfaction, a sense of well being - all the Joys of Living.

If such enjoyment of life is our number one goal then...  
Training yourself to Enjoy life is as important as training yourself to Achieve.

Learning to enjoy is easier for some of us than others. Studies show that there is a significant genetic component specifying one's capacity for happiness. But that's true for the ability to achieve as well. For those of us who aren't blessed with the best Enjoyment genes, we just have to practice it a bit harder.

Whatever nature gave you in the way of genes, there are definitely ways you can nurture more joy out of your everyday living.

Let's start by looking at three key reasons we don't enjoy life more.

### ■ **We assume enjoyment will come to us without focusing on its attainment.**

Our culture sends a message that if we work hard to earn a living, be a good person, and do the right thing, then the joys of life will automatically come to us. For most of us, that is not true. To earn a happy life, you have to stay aware and focus on capturing the joys of every day living.

### ■ **We feel guilty.**

As the pleasure of a moment starts warming your soul, often guilt raises its ugly head and says, "How dare you enjoy life with all the obligations and opportunities you have pending? Get moving!" Guess what...joy is necessary to your physical and mental well being. In addition enjoying life is a virtue that you cannot fully pass on to others, unless you know how to do it well yourself. If you feel guilty about enjoying for yourself, then do it for the benefit of those around you.

an impact already. We have better employee retention, which is significant in a competitive market like ours. Creating an environment that encourages and respects work/life balance is an important part of this effort.

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## Quotes from Epictetus

### The Art of Living

"Your happiness depends on three things, all of which are within your power: your will, your ideas concerning events in which you are involved, and the use you make of your ideas."

"Authentic happiness is always independent of external conditions. Vigilantly practice indifference to external conditions."

"Your happiness can only be found within."

Epictetus (A.D. 55-A.D. 135) How do I live a happy, meaningful and flourishing life? How can I be both a noble and effective person? Answering these questions was the single-minded passion of Epictetus, a Roman teacher and philosopher.

### ■ **We never were taught or we are out of practice.**

Children left to their own devices inherently will develop rudimentary skills for achieving and enjoying. Modern societies correctly take achievement much further, aggressively educating their children in the skills to achieve at high levels. It is a fortunate few, however, who have a parent, friend or mentor who instilled a strong sense of the joy of life in them. As a result most of us are sorely out of practice, or never really learned how to fully enjoy life to begin with.

Here's how to become an expert at enjoying life.

#### **1. Focus on Enjoyment every single day!**

Focusing on enjoyment every day keeps you from falling into a lifetime "As Soon As Trap." That is the life dulling pattern of getting around to the joys of life, "as soon as..." Being alert to the joys that run through your every day helps make happiness a habit, a good habit you will find hard to break.

#### **2. Savor the Moment.**

Every day of your life is filled with moments that are magical gems, if you are looking for them. They can be moments of accomplishment, friendship, love, a contented observation.

The occasional hug that you may give or get in the morning can be a special moment, a happy moment. It can be a motivation for your whole day, if you are really there, if you really feel it. But too often we miss those moments when they are happening.

If you are not there, if your mind is thinking, "What do I have to do when I get to work" or "get to school" or wherever you are headed, you've missed the magic because you've missed the moment.

But by literally taking 5 to 30 seconds to focus while that moment is happening or to dwell on it a bit after it happens, you can capture that magic and add it to your life.

#### **3. Learn from someone you know who is better at it.**

If you wanted to learn how to play golf and had a friend who excelled at the game, you would probably spend some time with them to get a few pointers. Well to learn more about enjoying life, do the same. Find someone who genuinely reflects an ability and interest in enjoying life and spend an evening, a day or weekend with them.

Ask about and observe not so much what they enjoy, but "how" and "why" they enjoy it. If you pay attention, as you would in a golf or tennis lesson, you will discover important things that you can start practicing yourself.

#### **4. Practice**

We turn knowledge into a skill by practice. Write yourself a reminder to practice focusing on enjoyment skills and savoring the moment every day. Don't expect immediate expertise, any more than you are going to break par the first time out on a golf course. But keep swinging and your enjoyment game will keep getting better.

#### **5. If necessary just act like you are enjoying it.**

If you are struggling a bit with this enjoyment thing, just act a little bit, pretend you are enjoying. Studies have shown that the physiology of the action, acting like you are enjoying something, often triggers positive feelings, just as feelings can trigger actions.

Savor the moments of your achievements, smiles and affections during the day as well as the grit and the grandeur of the people and world around you. Pause long enough for the joy to permeate your senses. It doesn't take long ...but it changes your life.

Jim Bird, Publisher