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My Work/Life Balance Lessons

By Christina Houle

With two children under the age of four at home and a third child due this spring, I'm constantly juggling. Some days I feel like I don't do everything as well as I would like to, but on others, things seem to fall into place.

I've found that with so many pressing responsibilities at work and home, the most important thing I can do is prioritize where I need to be, and then to be where I need to be. My family's health and well-being are my top priorities; my job comes right after that. This clarity helps me make wise choices about how I use my time so that both my family and Turner get what they deserve from me as a wife, mother and employee.

Here are some things I've learned about work-life balance that help me juggle effectively:

Get good support at home. We've had some bad daycare experiences that have made it hard for me to focus at work. My mother is now taking care of our children in her home; her willingness to do this and her ability to do it well makes all the difference in the world.

Play to your strengths. I'm a better cook than my husband – we know this from experience – so I have arranged my schedule so that I'm home early enough to cook dinner. This also gives my husband more time with the children in the morning, because he takes them to daycare after I've gone to work.

Find a system that works for you. I'm grateful that my supervisor allows me to arrive at work earlier than most so that I can leave earlier, too. I take advantage of this early quiet time to tackle my "heavy lifting" tasks – those assignments that take more mental energy and focus than others – when there are fewer distractions.

Your New Month's Resolution

During uncertain times the best way to stay positive is to have concrete objectives that you stick with, independent of all that is changing around you. Unfortunately it is a rare New Year's resolution that is followed up on. You can substantially improve your work and life in 2009 by replacing New Year's Resolutions with a much easier and more concrete New Month's Resolution. Here's how.

"This year I'm going to lose 30 lbs." "I'm going to get a promotion this year."

"I'll finish the courses for my certification" – typical New Year's resolutions. And we all know what usually happens with those resolutions?... Nothing. Well here is an easy way to make those Life Changing improvements a reality.

It starts with recognizing the two main causes for the lack of resolution resolve. The first common cause is we haven't chosen something important enough to us to really commit to RIGHT NOW. Secondly, when we do pick a very important life priority, we put no time into thinking through a specific action plan to make it a reality. It's just a vague goal to achieve over the year.

So let's take a simpler, easier and proven approach. Forget New Year's Resolutions. Let's just do a New Month's Resolution the right way. Our clients that follow the simple, concrete steps below have more than a 90% success rate on anchoring to and following through on their objectives.

Make Sure You Really Want To Do It

Take out a piece of paper right now (or open a blank page on your computer) and determine what truly is your most important life objective by doing the following:

1. List as many possible resolutions or objectives that might add important value to your life this year. Put down whatever comes to mind.
2. Prioritize each resolution as an A, B, or C.
3. Prioritize each "A" option as A1, A2, A3, etc.

When you are through look at you're A1 Resolution. How will your life change for the better if you accomplish it? Do you really want it to happen? If the answer is yes, then commit to it as your overriding goal just for the next month. If the answer is "No" that's fine. Look at the other top A's and pick one you really want to happen.

Your A1 is a precious opportunity; the most important objective you can think of to improve your life. And it only takes a few minutes to determine.

Follow Through and Make It Happen...for a month

Once you're committed to your A1 Resolution, here's how you can insure that you will make very meaningful progress on it over the next 30 days.

If your resolution is a behavioral one (exercise – eat differently – be more positive) follow the eTip from our last newsletter. Write a reminder of your committed behavior change in your calendar, every other day for a month.

Don't write it on every day, as you will tend to overlook it if you see it too routinely. Every other day will grab your attention. You may also want to stick a reminder up in your house, office and car.

When you see your prompts, remember your 30 day commitment. Immediately reflect your 30 day behavioral change. Just do it for this month.

At the end of the month, if you were pleased with the results, write reminder prompts again for the next 30 days. You will find that continuing the behavior you've established is much easier. Good habits are hard to break. 30 days establishes the habit.



Set your priorities at work every day.

I start each day by listing what needs to be done in order of importance. If something doesn't get done, I make sure I let people know why and the status of the task so that there are no surprises.

Learn to say "no." This relates more to extracurricular activities or nonessential travel (life is much harder for my family when I travel), especially now that I'm pregnant. Saying "no" when it's okay to do so helps protect my valuable family time in the evening.

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Quote from Ann Landers

"Let this coming year be better than all the others. Vow to do some of the things you've always wanted to do but couldn't find the time. ... Call up a forgotten friend. Drop an old grudge, and replace it with some pleasant memories. ... Vow not to make a promise you don't think you can keep. ... Walk tall, and smile more. You'll look 10 years younger. Don't be afraid to say, "I love you". Say it again. They are the sweetest words in the world."

Ann Landers was a pseudonym of primarily two authors who for 45 years wrote a syndicated newspaper advice column that was a regular feature in many newspapers across North America.

If Your Resolution has a Lot of Different Steps to Accomplish

Your A1 Resolution may require multiple activities. Unlike behavioral changes, other valuable projects usually have more activities than just writing consistent reminders in your planner. If that is the case with yours, don't quit now. Take a few extra minutes and plan out those activities.

No matter how important or overwhelming your A1 Resolution may seem, (get a promotion, refinance the house, modify the budget, create a new marketing plan) you can sort it out quickly...and make progress on it now.

Just write the more complex A1 Resolution at the top of another blank page. Then repeat the listing and prioritizing process used above with these modifications:

1. List all the Activities that you can think of to move your Resolution forward. Be creative. Write down every possibility you can think of.
2. Prioritize each activity as an A, B, or C.
3. Prioritize each "A" option as A1, A2, A3, etc.

You have just determined the most important Activity (A1) to accomplish your most important objective for 2009.

4. Now write at least that A1 starting Activity in your calendar, on the day you will do it.

Write any of the other sequenced activities (A2, A3, A4...) that you can determine a date for in your planner/calendar as well. Make sure those entrees appear on your Outlook or whatever calendaring system you refer to regularly.

In addition post this prioritized activities page in a place where you will see it several times a day. As you progress during the month check off the early A's of your monthly resolution, then schedule the other sequenced activities as your plan and schedule permit.

A Decade or More of Accomplishment in A Year

If you take 15 minutes now to apply these steps you will change your life for the better. Determine your most important New Month's Resolution, and how you will implement it. Get the time commitments in your calendar.

Do the same at the beginning of each month this year, referencing your previous priority list. If you follow through on this simple monthly prioritization you will accomplish more of the important objectives for your work and life in the next 12 months than most people do in a decade or even a lifetime.

But for now, don't be concerned about future months. Just focus on your one New Month resolution and implementation. By applying these four simple thinking steps in writing just for this month you will be starting a habit to regularly create a more successful 2009 for yourself and those around you.

Please don't ponder this. It may seem a bit mechanical, but that's what makes it easy. Take 10 or 15 minutes to do it now, or write down a time in the next 24 hours to do so. You will be amazed at the immediate positive actions that result over the next 30 days.

Happy New Month to You and Yours!

Jim Bird
Publisher

E-Tip: Use a Planner

Break It Down - Break down your objectives into action items that are small enough that you can schedule and do them in a limited time on a particular day. You can't schedule, "Get a Master's Degree" on Tuesday. You can schedule, "Check local college evening Masters' schedule for summer quarter" on a date and time you will do it. The most important date for any major objective is the start date. Break your goals down to small enough pieces to get started.