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My Work/Life Balance Lessons

By Tom Clavin

After many years of employment that include almost 13 with Turner, I have learned how to achieve a level of work-life balance that is a good fit for both me and my family. My overarching strategy has been to put my family – my wife and four children – first. This has given me a clarity that makes it easier to make the choices that support both my personal and professional goals. Here are some of the things I've learned over time that continue to serve me well:

Create Goals. Because I put family first, my goal has always been to try and get home in time for dinner with my family as often as I can. To do that, I need to leave work earlier than some, so I often start my day earlier than most. In fact, I'm often one of the first people on the job site each morning. I don't particularly enjoy getting up early, but doing so allows me to leave work when I'd like to, so it's worth it.

Understand the 80/20 rule of time management. There's a theory that people often get 80 percent of their work done in 20 percent of the time they're on the job. For me, that 20 percent is the time early in the morning when I tend to be at my peak performance level, the job site is quieter, and there are fewer interruptions.

Know Yourself. It helps to understand your biorhythms. Knowing that I do my best work in the first half of the day, I manage my time so I'm doing the more difficult or mentally-challenging tasks then. I tend to slow down later in the day, so I save the less taxing projects for late afternoon. I get a second wind in the evening, and will often respond to e-mails that require more thought at that time.

Cancel Your Guilt Trip

We all have many “could have, should have” moments in life. “If only I'd done this” or “hadn't done that”, then things would have been so much better.” Just because hindsight is 100% there is no reason guilt should be. Make sure the lessons from your “If only” moments are learned quickly at the beginning of your guilt trip and then cancel the rest of it - for your benefit and for that of everyone around you. Here's how. (Reading time 120 seconds).

Recognize That Excessive Guilt Is Counterproductive

The stress caused from guilt is a proven major contributor to physical, mental and emotional deterioration and disease. You know what happens when you are on a constant guilt or stress trip - you get tense, uptight, dull, unfocused, burned out. Your productivity and creativity go down. Obviously not good things!

And yet this type of gnawing guilt is pervasive today – and it unnecessarily distracts and undermines our everyday life. It usually comes in two forms.

Deserved guilt and regret - This is the guilt that is generated from mistakes, slights and poor judgments you've made. There is and should be value learned from this type of deserved guilt, to a point. If you've made a mistake, guilt helps the lesson sink in. But move that process along. One way to do that is to really focus on it. Face it head on. Admit you screwed up and get it out. It may be helpful to yell or cry about it. Reach out where appropriate to others to apologize or make up as best you can for the mistake.

Then, make sure the lessons are learned. Imbed them in your mind for future avoidance. Once done you need to shrug off the guilt of your accepted mistake and move on. Just because hindsight is 100% there is no reason guilt should be. Make sure any lessons from your “if only” thoughts are learned at the beginning of your guilt trip and then cancel the rest of it.

The second type of guilt is undeserved self-imposed guilt – This guilt derives from the self-imposed expectations you put on yourself or unreasonable obligations you accept from others.

The most common consequence from this invasive undeserved guilt is the neglect of self. I am consistently told by clients that when they get ready to take a little time focused just on themselves - guilt raises its head and says, “How dare you? You have duties and obligations at work, commitments, family members depending on you. How dare you think of taking time just for you?”

When guilt tries to pull that on you, remind yourself of the tense, burned out direction you head in when you don't invest a bit in self time. Besides the negative impact on your productivity and creativity realize the impact on everyone around you. When you are in that stressed out, grumbling mode other people avoid you. You repel positive people like the opposite negative pole of a magnet. Communications break down and things fall through the cracks. As a result, the productivity and enjoyment of others in their job and in their lives suffer from your guilty, stressed out state.

So please, if you can't justify getting over the guilt and taking some self-time just for you, then please...do it for the rest of us! We want you to. We need you to. It's not only okay to put a little self relaxation and fun in your life just for you, it's actually virtuous. It helps the rest of us.



Be open-minded about how you manage your time.

While I'm a fairly social person who enjoys conversations, I usually don't take advantage of the opportunities to have lunch out with colleagues or to socialize at the coffee maker at the start of the day because I want to leave work in time to be home for dinner. I'd rather work through lunch so I can try to leave by 5 p.m. without guilt.

Find time to recharge. Making time for hobbies helps me rewind at the end of the day. For example, I'm a history buff and enjoy watching historical documentaries in the evening after I've spent time with my family. In addition, now that the weather's warmer, I'm looking forward to kayaking with my children.

Tom Clavin is a safety manager in the Albany business unit.

Quotes

"Iron rusts from disuse; water loses its purity from stagnation... even so does inaction sap the vigor of the mind."

"It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things."

"Life is pretty simple: You do some stuff. Most fails. Some works. You do more of what works. If it works big, others quickly copy it. Then you do something else. The trick is the doing something else."

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was an Italian Renaissance painter and inventor.

So plan it right now. At lunch today, take a little 30 minute vacation just for you. Do something else positive for yourself on the way home and again this weekend. You will not only benefit yourself but everyone around you.

If you don't deserve to be happy, who does?

I was recently watching one of our corporate partners deliver a work-life session to his organization. He made a wonderful point about happiness and the example we set for others. He said,

"Think about the example you are setting for your children and others you care about. Do you want them to be happy and take care of their own physical, mental and emotional well being? Do you want them to forgive themselves when they make a mistake? Well they are watching you. And if you feel too guilty to do things just for you, then you set the example that they should feel guilty when they take time for personal satisfaction and joy. And once learned that will be the lesson that gets passed on and on and on. So who ever gets to be happy? Who deserves it?"

Well the answer to that is we all do, which means you do. And you should be setting the example for others by balancing your life with positive self time. In the process, you should ban long guilt trips. Take a trip to the book store, or to the mall, or the next city... but not to where guilt is. If you just have to take a guilt trip to instill the lesson, make it short!

Remember humans make mistakes. You are human. Treat yourself humanely.

All of us will benefit.

Smiles,

Jim Bird, *Publisher*

E-tip

Be Willing To Say "No"

You can't be all things to all people at the same time. You also can't do everything at once. You have to recognize these simple facts to relieve unnecessary guilt and stress in your life. You need to be willing to say "Not now" or "No" to things that shouldn't be your current priorities. When someone asks you to do something in an unrealistic time frame, in a nice way tell them you have other commitments today and tomorrow but you could do it by the end of the week. Would that work for them? Or, if it is a voluntary lower priority item than things you've already planned, let them know that in the scope of plans you have coming up, you don't think it is a commitment you can do justice to at this time. Everyone is better off when you say no to some things so you can focus on the most important items in your current professional and personal life.