



My Work/Life Balance Lessons

By Travis Harris

I'm a big proponent of work/life balance because I've seen people burn out when their lives have been way out of balance. Burnout sneaks up and hits you like a sledgehammer – and it's very hard to recover from that. We have a lot of high energy people at Turner who think this won't happen to them, but I worry that it will and that we'll lose good talent because of it.

And while I'm constantly reminding them to work fewer hours and take their vacations, I have to remind myself, too, to be a good role model. What's good for my co-workers is good for me. Here are a few things I've learned about maintaining balance at Turner that help me make sure I find time for what's important to me and my family.

Improve your efficiency by finding a rhythm that works for your job. I've found that some tasks are better left for certain parts of the day than for others. For example, I walk the job during the middle part of the day because the work crews have started and I can talk to their foremen without interruptions. I do my planning late in the afternoon because the work crews are gone and won't interrupt me and because the people I need to talk to in the office are still there.

Take that vacation. Everything will be just fine when you're gone but if something goes wrong, you will recover from it. Give yourself a safety net by giving your replacement detailed instructions about what needs to happen in your absence. We call that the "Aloha letter" in our office – we make sure our responsibilities are covered and we wave goodbye.

Make time for yourself. For me, that might be leaving my phone at home when I go on vacation, helping coach my sons' teams, or enjoying my woodworking hobby. We can't be thinking about work all the time.

Accept that there will always be too much work. Too many people fall into the trap

Current Issue, May 2008

"Don't Forget to STAY GREEN"

When You are Green, You Grow And When You Are Ripe, You Rot

When you know you have a lot to learn, you are green, like a fresh, green tomato... growing. And when you think you've learned about all you need to know, you are like an overly ripe tomato...starting to rot. Stay green. (Reading time 120 seconds)

My profession and passion is work and life learning. I know from that experience that no matter how rich the knowledge, whatever the source, it is useless to the individual that is "Too smart for that." These are the folks who are too busy for it, don't need it or immediately tell you why it won't work before they even understand what it is.

I know it's easy to become that ripe tomato. Everyone is willing to give you free advice. Paying for it doesn't necessarily make it any better. All of us have been exposed to enough poor one-on-one advice and indifferent education from professors or the corporate learning industry, that a bit of skepticism is in order.

Being skeptical is understandable. But being closed-minded is stupid. Some of the dumbest people I've ever met know it all.

I've observed so many corporate meetings and training sessions where certain participants' body language and facial expressions clearly convey what they are thinking: "This is going to be a crock and a total waste of my time." This is before the session has even started. These people are ripe.

On the other hand, the skeptic with an open mind often comes in and states, "I'll be happy if I get one thing from this that I can take away." Having waded through many tedious meetings they had learned that sometimes you have to search for the knowledge. They came in to focus on finding at least one kernel of knowledge that would help them go forward. They came to learn. They were green.

When a session surprises them by being full of kernels, their focus lets them feed and grow from the whole ear. Whereas the overly ripe person will learn nothing unless an exceptionally talented presenter uses some mental crow bar to pry open a little crack so some value can seep in.

Great work and life lessons surround you everyday. They offer themselves up in conversations, in reports, in books, in meetings. These lessons are there for the taking through observations; of your co-workers; your customers; each of your family members. But are you observing, looking for that kernel? Are you learning if they are growing? If so, how? If not, can you help? Or are you just blowing through your day ripe in your knowledge of how to do your routine?

Listen. Observe. Ask why? Please focus first on why something will work before you start probing why it won't.

Ask yourself what have I learned from someone today? What have I learned about someone today? What have I learned about myself today? If you don't have an answer by the end of today, be careful. You may be ripe.

of working until everything's done. It will never be completely done. Do the best you can, focusing on what's most important, and leave the rest for tomorrow. It will still be there in the morning.

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Quotes

The purpose of learning is growth, and our minds, unlike our bodies, can continue growing as we continue to live.

In the case of good books, the point is not to see how many of them you can get through, but how many can get through to you.

Not to engage in the pursuit of ideas is to live like ants instead of men.

Mortimer Adler
(Dec 28, 1902-June 28, 2001) was an American philosopher and author.

In the process it is critical to stay focused on the difference between fact and opinion. Opinion is an idea believed to be valid without positive facts to support it. Knowledge is an apprehension of truth or fact through reasoning.

We get bombarded with hundreds of opinions every day from conversations, meetings, talk shows and news outlets. We keep growing by sorting out the facts, analyzing the opinions and accumulating knowledge through reasoning.

That reasoned evaluation should apply to your own opinions as well. Remember just because you have gained significant knowledge or success in one area of life does not make you equally knowledgeable in another area. Being a financial wizard doesn't make you an expert on personal relationships. Being a successful entertainer does not make you an expert on world affairs. Being a great parent doesn't make you an expert on fitness. But if you stay green, and keep looking for opportunities to learn, you can and do become smarter in many areas of life. If we stay green long enough, we may learn enough about the world and people and ourselves to even become wise.

So don't be too smart to really listen to others, seek the kernels, observe and find knowledge through reasoning. Stay green forever.

Jim Bird
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E-Tip

Read a half-hour per day on a subject and at the end of the year you will be an expert on that topic. Keep a book on your nightstand and read prior to going to sleep.