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## My Work/Life Balance Lessons

By Tina Smith

I reached a work-life balance turning point a few years ago at Turner when I struggled with a particularly difficult work environment. My unhappiness with the situation forced me to step back and evaluate what was important to me at that point in my career. It was clear that while I needed to be challenged professionally, I also needed more time with my husband and daughters, who are now 11 and 13. After some soul searching, I asked to reduce my schedule to a 30-hour week. I was surprised – and thrilled – when my supervisor said he would find a way to make it work.

And he did.

I have since worked on several projects in different locations in Northern California, where I'm currently assigned to my largest, a \$300 million expansion at the San Francisco airport. In other projects, I've been able to work from home one day a week and while that's not an option at this site, there are other benefits and challenges that make it a rewarding fit for me.

I still take Fridays off, using that time to participate in the school carpool and run errands so our weekends are more relaxed and enjoyable. Here are some of the things I've learned about how to achieve more balance by working reduced hours at Turner:

- **Look for a win-win situation.**

My first project after we cut my hours was with one of my former supervisors, who knew what I was capable of and wanted the situation to succeed. Since then, I've tried to surround myself with people who are advocates for work-life balance because that attitude does make a difference with the success of each assignment.

- **Try to be consistent with your schedule.** My one day off a week is always Friday except in those rare

## Being More Interesting To Others

**By striking a balance between being more interested IN the other person and being more interesting TO the other person you add the most value to any relationship.** (Reading time 180 seconds).

Being interested "in" the other person is critically important to creating a good relationship. But, if that's all you do and have nothing to contribute of your own, you can be dull. On the other hand, if you spend all your time together trying to be interesting "to" the other person, just talking about what you know and your insights, you risk being a bore. If you do neither of these things then you are both dull and boring.

In a previous newsletter we addressed being more interested IN others. This issue focuses on four simple ways to develop the important complimentary relationship skill, being more interesting TO others.

At first blush this is hard for some people. Many of us are shy. I for one am a naturally introverted person. I found though that even if you are inherently shy, you can consciously learn to be more interesting and that the reward of deeper, more meaningful relationships is well worth it.

Look at the four tips below and pick out the ones that you might not be doing as well as you could. By implementing them better you should see immediate benefits for you and your relationships.

### 1. Open Up

In personal relationships, be willing to volunteer more about yourself. If you don't express your opinions, begin doing so. Don't be afraid to have those opinions challenged. That's the way you test them to see if they are really good opinions or not. It is also the way others get to know you.

When someone in a personal setting asks you a question, don't give one word answers. "Fine", "Yes", "No" and "OK" are not very revealing comments, and don't invite more questions or conversation from the other person. Take 5 seconds to think about the question and add some details. "My day was fine. It was productive and a group of us went to lunch with a new manager, which I enjoyed." Or, "Yes, I do like to travel although I don't get to do it as much for fun as I would like to. When I can I like going to the ocean and have been to some great beach spots."

When you open up, focus on your positive emotions. Be enthusiastic about the good things in your day or job or life and the hobbies and pleasures you enjoy. In general people are not interested in your health problems or everyday trials and tribulations. When there are life problems or questions you'd like to talk out, you should open up to close family and friends about them. That is made much easier when you have routinely opened up to them with the little and big positives in your life.

### 2. Have more interesting things to talk about

You gather more interesting things to talk about by being more interested in the real world around you. Entertainment TV is not the real world. Now don't get me wrong. I enjoy watching TV. But I encourage you to switch at least one hour a week or more from watching made up people, and their made up lives on TV to learning about and enjoying real people, real lives, real plans and the real issues shaping your present and future world. Here's how to do that:

- Read a national or international newspaper recognized for its journalism at least once a week.

In a survey conducted among 1000 executives, politicians, academics and journalist in 50 countries the two best rated newspapers in the world were the Financial Times (UK) and the Wall Street Journal (US). The best fact based journalists in the world work for these papers and they cover much more than financial news. In addition, unlike your



situations where I'm needed on-site that day. Taking the same day off every week helps all of us plan better because it's predictable.

- **Be a great time manager.** When I worked from home one day a week, I did tasks that could be easily done off-site, like responding to e-mail or taking online training on those days so I could maximize my time in the business unit or on the job site.
- **Be flexible.** If I'm invited to a meeting on my day off or scheduled to work from home, I explain that I'm not available to participate in person but would be able to join by telephone. Nine times out of 10, the meeting is rescheduled to one of my on-site work days with no issue.
- **Don't be afraid to ask for what you need.** I am really pleased that the company has supported my need for a different work situation. It has allowed me to get the balance that works for me while continuing to keep me challenged professionally, and I'm grateful for that.

*Tina Smith is senior project manager in the Oakland business unit.*

#### Quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson

*The only gift is a portion of thyself.*

*Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is of you.*

*Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.*

*That which we persist in doing becomes easier, not that the task itself has become easier, but that our ability to perform it has improved.*

**Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803 – 1882) was an American essayist, philosopher and poet.

local paper, you will read articles written by the leaders of the world, not just about them. Whether it is heads of state, business, entertainment, education or science you will find them writing for these publications. As a result you will always take away something interesting to talk about. Although they have slipped substantially in the ratings, also in the top 10 are the New York Times (UK) and the International Herald Tribune (France).

- Read and listen to a variety of professional opinion makers.

When you read a quality newspaper, one of the most important things to read is the editorials that catch your attention. There are also some entertaining and thought provoking radio commentators you can grab snippets of as you drive **READ AND LISTEN TO BOTH SIDES OF AN ARGUMENT** as best you can. You will be better informed and much wiser if you don't get all your ideas from one place.

- Find a laugh to share.

Learn a funny story or joke to tell each week. We all like to laugh and just the attempt to try and do so pleases people. After you hear or read a joke that made you laugh, tell it to the next three people you meet. If you do, you will never forget it. The practice also makes you more confident when you tell it to those most important to you.

### 3. Have a plan for what to talk about when you are going to be with someone.

As a young man I was always concerned about the long awkward silences on a date. So I would watch for things of interest to talk about during the week and store them up. Then when those awkward pauses came up, I would have something that I hoped would be fun or of interest to bring up. I still do that today.

We all take the time to dress and groom to be more attractive. Many take time to exercise to have a healthier, more appealing body. It's even more important to take the time to be interesting!

### 4. Remember you must also...Be interested IN them.

Just because you have things to say, doesn't mean you have to say them all. Part of your plan should always be to listen, and if the other person isn't talking to ask questions. Ask enough questions until you find a common ground. Or introduce a topic and ask them what they think about it. Being interested "In" people compliments being interesting "To" them. They will find you more interesting because you are interested in them.

Go out now and do something to make yourself more interesting.

Jim Bird  
Publisher

## E-Tip

### Do Something Different Together

Doing something different with someone creates a unique shared experience that can provide interesting memories and conversation for years to come. It can be a sports or entertainment event, joint lessons, or travel to a new place. One favorite is to do an internet search for hiking trails near you and go on a day trip hike together.