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## My Work/Life Balance Lessons

By Derek Brown

Work-life balance doesn't just mean working a 40-hour week, and in this business 40 hours usually doesn't cut it. For me, work life balance means getting the most out of both and trying to minimize the impact of one on the other. Sometimes that means spending more time on the job and sacrificing time at home, and sometimes it means the opposite.

My work-life balance goal is to make sure that I'm around when my two young children want me to be the most, to get the most bang for the buck, so to speak. If there's an important school event, I want to be there because I don't want them to feel neglected or to think that my job is keeping me from them. Here are some things I do:

- **Establish a routine.** I always try to be home for dinner, even if that means we eat a little later than we'd like. After dinner, I give the children their baths before reading to them and tucking them into bed. This routine allows me to spend time with them while my wife gets a break. I use the quiet time after they're in bed to wrap up any work I didn't finish before I left the office.
- **Use technology wisely.** I get a little distance from my job responsibilities by putting my Blackberry in a drawer when I get home from work. I check it periodically, but only when it won't inconvenience my wife or children. If I need to respond to messages, I do so after the children are in bed.
- **Manage your time according to your rhythms – or those of your workplace.** I tackle tasks that are detailed or require a great deal of attention first thing in the morning when the office is quiet and before emergencies arise. I also ignore the telephone and my inbox if that's what it takes to get something done.

## Reach Out and Touch Someone

**Personal relationships are an exchange; a trade. Each person is trading value received for value given. Are you contributing your share?** (Reading time 180 seconds)

One of the joys of personal relationships is that the more you are able to give to the relationship, the more you usually receive in return. There are two essential ways to contribute more to any relationship:

1. Be more **Interested IN** the other person.
2. Be more **Interesting TO** the other person.

Let's talk first about #1: Being more interested IN the other person. Just as you want to share the things that are important to you with your friends and family - others want to do the same with you. And when something little or big makes us happy we want to talk about it. We hope our friends and family want to hear about it and be happy with our joy. Their doing so is essential to us considering them a friend.

As a result, one of the biggest values the other person wants from your relationship...is to know, by your words and actions, that you care about **what is important to them** - what interests them, motivates them and makes them happy.

When a relationship is good, and certainly when it is great, each person regularly feels and expresses interest, support and a joy for the things that bring the other person happiness. Being tuned-in to those things is central to what caring for someone means. It is also at the heart of how deep love reflects itself.

This is an important lesson I continue to learn.

My wife has always loved to garden. I on the other hand have never liked digging in the dirt and as a result paid little attention to her hobby. About three years ago the deer population near our home grew to the point that not a vegetable or flower could be grown, as the plant would be eaten to a nub before it could develop. For two years my wife stopped gardening. She missed it. This past spring she asked me if I would help her solve the problem. I agreed to install a small solar panel to power an electric fence around a portion of our yard in the hopes of keeping the deer out.

In doing so I took interest and got engaged in her hobby. Fortunately the deer were kept at bay and she has had a wonderful crop: tomatoes, squash, green beans, eggplant, herbs and flowers. I think even she had forgotten how much enjoyment and relaxation her gardening brought her. It clearly makes her happy.

And whether I am picking vegetables with her or just asking about the day's harvest her renewed pleasure does give me great joy. I am still not digging in the dirt, but I am getting lots of personal satisfaction, smiles as well as delicious fresh vegetables from showing an interest in her gardening passion. My small investment of interest in her hobby continues to pay me back many times over.

But showing deep interest in someone doesn't require you to put up solar panels or directly share the other person's hobbies. Just by regularly asking about their interests you let that person know you care about what motivates and is important to them.

I was reminded of this as I viewed the many tributes to Tony Snow and Tim Russert after their deaths within weeks of each other. They were both popular national commentators who seemed very happy in their own lives and able to spread that happiness to others. Whatever they thought of Tony's or Tim's political views, individuals of all political stripes talked of how much they valued the relationship with each of them. The common theme was that these men had a keen awareness of the lives and interests of those they knew – from the doorman to the president. **And they conveyed that interest.** They asked about you, your life, your loved ones – and they really listened for your answer.

So how can you and I do the same and consistently contribute more value to our important relationships? Just let the other person KNOW through your words, observations and attitude that you care about their ambitions, goals, everyday joys and well being.



- **Use the right form of communication for the situation.**

Think about the most effective mode for the situation – telephone, e-mail, or an in-person conversation. For example, I can trade 10 e-mails to set up a meeting or pick up the phone and have it set up in 30 seconds.

- **Lose the guilt.** I like coaching soccer and t-ball. It gives me a chance to spend fun time with the kids and allows me to get to know their friends. But it also means that I have to leave work early one day a week during those seasons. I don't feel guilty about that – in the same way that I don't feel guilty when I have to work late. It all balances out eventually.

*Derek Brown is a construction executive with Tomkins Builders, Inc.*

**Quote from  
Francois de La Rochefoucauld**

*Few are agreeable in conversation, because each thinks more of what he intends to say than of what others are saying, and listens no more when he himself has a chance to speak.*

*To listen closely and reply well is the highest perfection we are able to attain in the art of conversation.*

Francois de La Rochefoucauld (1613 – 1680) was a French noble and writer.

But you have to tell them. Caring deeply for someone's happiness delivers little value unless expressed in words and actions. **Your silence will not inform them.** You might think, "We've been friends long enough" or "together long enough"... "that they should know I care." Not really.

We all have our insecurities. Having the regular reinforcement of a positive tone and interested questions from someone you care for, means much more to the other person than you realize.

So today or tonight pick out someone you care for. When you see them, turn away from the TV or the emails you are answering and intentionally **ask** about their day, their work, their new car or their "garden" and **listen** with sincere curiosity.

This usually doesn't take long. But short or long it shows you care and in most cases they will be pleased or relieved or happy in telling you. Be pleased, relieved or happy with them. When you do this you will be reinforcing their knowledge and confidence that you really care for them.

In the relationship exchange you will be offering more in trade. By making a small regular effort with your words, observations and attitude you will strengthen and deepen your value to the other person. This investment in them will almost always provide you with a very generous return - a more committed friend, respectful business associate or loving personal partnership.

Start today. Reach out and touch someone with meaningful focus and interested questions. Pay full attention when they talk. Add more to your life, by being more interested IN others.

And in an upcoming newsletter, we'll explore some easy tips on being more interesting TO others.

Smiles,  
Jim Bird  
Publisher

### **E-Tip: Listen Intently**

Look for feelings and their intent beyond the words. Ask follow up questions. Don't be so focused on what you will say next that you don't keep your ears open to all of what's said. Genuinely interested listening is one of the highest compliments you can pay anyone.