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My Work/Life Balance Lessons

By Carrie Schambach

Since getting married about a year ago, my work-life balance situation has become a little more complicated than it used to be, when my schedule only affected me. Now, my husband and I are more aware of each other's routines as we try to make sure we have time together at home. Also, we adopted a puppy a few months ago, which introduced a few other obligations to our responsibilities. We manage it well, though, and I feel like I have decent work-life balance, perhaps because my colleagues understand that while I love my job, there are other things in my life that I love, too.

Here's what I do to make sure I have time to visit family in Cincinnati, spend time with friends, prepare at least two or three home-cooked meals every week, take a weekly yoga class, or walk the dog with my husband in the evening:

Try to keep things in perspective.

All it takes is one tragedy to help you understand what is really important in life. I was recently reminded of this when friends lost their infant. I'm grateful that Turner has given me the schedule flexibility to support my friends at the funeral and to continue to be present as they cope with their terrible loss.

Exercise with a partner. Exercising is always a good idea for work-life balance because it helps reduce stress levels, but exercising with a partner can be even better. When you commit to meeting at a specific place and time, you are more likely to follow through because somebody is waiting for you.

Share a calendar. My husband and I share a Google calendar online and update it constantly. Our calendar keeps track of our work schedule changes, appointments, social activities, and anything else that a

Do We Expect Too Much of Ourselves?

What we expect of ourselves greatly impacts our work-life balance. Expecting too little from the talents and gifts we have limits the variety and richness of the life we can experience. On the other hand, constantly expecting too much of ourselves can have a negative impact not only on our enjoyment of life, but also the achievement of our highest aspirations. Here's how you can avoid that. (Reading time 180 seconds).

Achievement and enjoyment, the core components of a positive work-life balance can be hijacked by unrealistic expectations and harsh self judgments about your current level of accomplishment.

"We have expanded what we expect of material success and physical appearance so that it's completely unrealistic", according to Robert Leahy, doctor of psychiatry and director of the American Institute for Cognitive Therapy.

When our exposure to the world and its wonders was more limited, so were our ambitions. When our array of capabilities as individuals and societies was more constrained, so was our desired reach. At one time a "Chicken in every pot and a car in every yard" was considered a winning political slogan in the US.

Since that slogan elected a president, decades of unparalleled growth in productivity and communications have multiplied our capabilities, our wealth and our exposure to the affluence of others. This has raised our definition of success. And in a very important way that is good, as great progress is never made without great aspirations.

But on a personal level, unnecessarily expanding your expectations of what you must have to be a success, or to be happy, can set you up for the negative consequences of excessive self-criticism. Conversely, appreciating the success you have and do achieve every day, can add greatly to your life value and balance. This was brought home to me by two chance encounters I had within a few of days of each other.

The first was when I was flying home from a business trip and struck up a conversation with a thirty something mom sitting next to me. During our pleasant conversation I learned her husband, who worked on Wall Street, was rebuilding his career after his previous firm went under during the recent banking shake outs. I mentioned reading that the average expected pay for this year (from janitor to managing partner) at one of the surviving top investment banking firms was \$700,000 – despite the downturn in the economy. Her stressful response was, "Yes, but \$700,000 doesn't go very far in New York."

A day or two later a sign that read "Fresh vegetables and fruit market" caught my eye as I was driving home from work. The sign was stuck up in the window of a storefront in a somewhat run down strip mall. I parked and walked into what was a small informal open space with waste high, loosely arranged, wooden bins. They held lush corn, peaches, potatoes, squash and tomatoes all looking like they had just been dug or picked from a field nearby. What caught my eye was the fresh okra, something that is hard to find and delicious when pan fried.

The establishment was manned by one gentleman with a delightful Jamaican accent. He greeted the few customers who came in with a warm hello and offered attentive happy assistance. As I checked out my small purchase (the okra for dinner was \$1) I told the smiling proprietor that I would be back with my wife, both because of his selection of produce and also his happy style. He made it fun to be there. As he made change from a cigar box his response to me was, "If you are not happy today, then what day are you waitin' for?"

As I drove home thinking about the question it struck me that our high self-expectations sometimes can keep us "waitin' for" some other day to be happy. When in fact, where we



family might track. It is incredibly helpful for us to be working off a single calendar which we both contribute to and one we can both access from work, home, or anywhere we can use Google.

Help your colleagues. In one of my previous positions at Turner, a member of my project team had to be on-site most Saturdays and often into the evening hours. While it might fall into the job description of a single person on the team, it seemed like an unfair burden, so we rotated that responsibility.

Explore ways to increase your own efficiency. Why work 14-hour days if you can get the work done in 10 hours? One thing that helps me work towards a more desirable work day is a paper planning system that helps me keep track of what I need to do in an organized way. I prefer paper to electronic because writing things down helps me to remember them. Plus, I receive a small sense of accomplishment when I cross items off my to-do list.

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Quotes

“Ambition is so powerful a passion in the human breast, that however high we reach we are never satisfied.”

“We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done.”

“Man is always more than he can know of himself; consequently, his accomplishments, time and again, will come as a surprise to him.”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(February 27, 1807 – March 24, 1882)
was an American educator and poet.
His works include “Paul Revere’s Ride”
and *The Song of Hiawatha*.

are right now probably is okay, maybe even pretty good in its own right.

Your current livelihood or circumstances may be below that of a micro-scale vegetable stand vendor or above a \$700,000 Wall Street banker, or somewhere in-between. But wherever you fall at the moment, you should not let your expectations of where you hoped to be undermine the recognition of the successes you’ve achieved and the enjoyments that are available to you today.

Sometimes our talents and circumstances reward us with the attainment of our expectations. Sometimes they don’t. And always there are setbacks, events and surprises beyond our control.

In evaluating your status, you are probably your own worst critic. If so, you are not alone. Over four hundred years ago John Milton wrote that the mind “can make a hell out of heaven, or a heaven out of hell.” The meaning and value we receive from life comes more from our state of mind than our state of place.

“I often see professionals who believe that if they didn’t flog themselves, they wouldn’t be as successful. Part of my work is to break through that belief,” says doctor Katherine Muller, director of the Psychology Training Center at Montefiore Medical Center. “People usually succeed in spite of their Inner Critics, not because of them.”

In previous articles we’ve detailed the solid research that demonstrates how the positive or negative nature of your self-evaluation turns on or off genes in your body that impact everything from the productiveness of your thinking to your susceptibility to disease and everyday energy levels. So as you routinely self-evaluate the attainment of your expectations be positive and inclusive.

Don’t just dwell on what you haven’t accomplished. Credit yourself and take pride in what you have achieved both externally and internally. Dollars and things count, but so do relationships. And most importantly, so do the virtues you’ve developed and positive emotions and support you reflect.

Truthfulness, courage, lovingness, work ethic and fortitude are the types of goals that add meaning and quality to your life. They enrich who you are as much as what you have. Pat yourself on the back for arriving at where you are as a person, as you aspire to grow and improve in the future.

And as you show up and strive towards your future aspirations, also remember the core expectations that produce everyday value and balance. They are in fact the very definition of work-life balance: To achieve something today and to enjoy something today. Daily deliverance on those two expectations always produces a happier, more rewarding life and will help keep your expectations of yourself well balanced.

Smiles,
Jim Bird, Publisher

Acknowledgement Note: The quotes referenced in this article were excerpted from an excellent piece entitled “Silencing the Voice That Says You’re a Fraud”, by Melinda Beck, in the Wall Street Journal on June 16, 2009.

E-tip

Woody Allen is credited with saying 90% of life is showing up. Others say attitude is everything. Just to be safe, why not show up every day with an attitude...a good one.