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My Work/Life Balance Lessons

By Bill DePasquale

One year ago on August 4, my life and my family's life changed when I was diagnosed with throat cancer.

The doctor said, "Bill you are entering unknown territory. Right now, all I know is the location of your cancer. I have to schedule you for several tests to be in a position to set up a treatment schedule that will probably have you out of work for four to six months." (When people say, "I'm a cancer survivor," they're not referring to the illness. They're talking about the treatment. Nine weeks of radiation and chemo treatments took a lot out of me.)

I replied, "I'm familiar with this scenario. At Turner, we approach every major challenge the same way. I'm ready whenever you are to get started."

We went home that night, put our six-year-old daughter Bella Grace to bed, called my eldest daughter Gina in San Diego, and agreed that medically we were in the right hands. My wife, Judee, turned to me and asked, "Are you going to lose your job? Does your medical plan cover long-term illness?"

I looked at her sheepishly and said, "I think so. I'll make some calls in the morning."

The first person I talked to was my project executive, Paul Parmentola. He looked at me with concern and said, "I know you're going to make it through this thing. Take as much time as you need to get well and the job will be here for you when you return."

Then I called Kathleen McCartney in human resources. After explaining my situation, there was silence for about 20 seconds. I thought we had been disconnected. Then she said, "Billy, I am so sorry. Is there anything I can do?" I mentioned health and disability insurance and she said, "No, no, don't worry about that. I will take care of

Leaving Home at Home

Successfully leaving your personal issues and activities at home when you are at work can substantially improve your productivity on the job and the quality of your life away from work as well. (Reading time 120 seconds).

A typical manager is interrupted 6 times an hour. Many non-management office workers are interrupted more than 70 times a day. Studies show that it takes an average of 5 to 6 minutes to recover from each interruption. The net loss in productive time often exceeds 2 hours per working day.

You know this is true. You experience it multiple times a day after you have been interrupted: "Now where was I; what was my train of thought; how was I going to compose this response; well maybe I'll recheck my email before I get started back...etc."

Some interruptions from co-workers and clients are a necessary part of our jobs. But many of our personal interruptions and diversions are not. Leaving unnecessary personal issues and interruptions at home enables you to get more done at work, advances your career and reduces stress when you are away from the job as well. When you have had a full productive normal work day you are less likely to feel stressed or obligated to do or dwell on unfinished work during your personal hours. So here are 10 pointers for leaving home at home.

1. Clearly communicate to adult family and friends that when you are at work you are at work. Unless it's truly urgent, explain that it is better for them to note items down and communicate them to you after work. That way you can devote your full attention to those personal issues, which you can't do when you are in the middle of multiple things at work.
2. If you have younger children, you want them to call when they feel a need to. But even with children it is helpful to both of you to explain boundaries and set examples of meaningful focus both at work and home.
3. When you get home prove your point. Really give family members focused time to update you. That means no looking at your computer, TV, Blackberry or equivalent while listening. If you are traveling, call home with that same focused attention. Remember, people are not tasks. Multi-tasking is good, multi-peopling is not. Really listen! 5 minutes of true, undistracted attention, is more valuable to your personal relationship than an hour of multitasking while supposedly listening.
4. When there are personal issues to discuss that are more involved than day-to-day updates, schedule a meeting time in the evening or on the weekend to address them. When you resolve those issues at your meeting it frees up your other time together for REAL Play time, undistracted by unaddressed major decision topics. Those resolved personal issues will no longer be a distraction at work. In addition you will be more recharged when you go back to work by your better focused play time.
5. Acquire and use a daily calendar that you keep with you at all times to record both **your** personal as well as professional commitments! This one habit alone, recording at a specific time the personal items you want to do or commit to do, will greatly reduce your tendency to be pulled away from work on personal issues.
6. When a personal question or "to do" pops in your mind at work, write in your calendar/planner when you will address it on personal time, and forget it until then. By doing so it won't keep popping up and distracting you.
7. Let personal emails, IM's and phone messages accumulate and answer them when you take a break or at lunch or after you finish work. Do not immediately respond. By grouping your responses you reduce the mental rebooting time from being taken off task multiple times.
8. If instant access to you is not necessary for your work, shut down your email and IM programs while you are on other work tasks. Don't answer the phone in the middle of a thought through action either. Once you reach a break point where you won't lose time by mentally rebooting, check voice mail.



the insurance. I mean, is there anything I can do for you or your family?"

It was then I realized I was not alone.

Day after day, we take things for granted – our health, family, co-workers, and Turner. Life goes on until something serious happens. Then, in one brief moment, it comes to a screeching halt. You feel alone, confused and scared of what tomorrow has in store for you and your family.

I have good news for everyone. When the chips are down, Turner walks the “work-life balance” walk. They were involved in every aspect of my illness. The visits from my co-workers and the e-mails of concern and encouragement from management really helped. I credit my recovery – at my one-year anniversary, I am in remission – to my faith, my doctors, my family at home and my Turner family at work.

At the end of the day, Turner cares. In a crisis, Turner makes sure that our work-life balance is addressed.

Bill DePasquale is project manager, field operations, in the New York City business unit.

**Quote from
Alexander Graham Bell**

Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus.

Alexander Graham Bell (1847 – 1922) was an eminent scientist, inventor and innovator who is widely credited with the invention of the telephone.

9. Use the 1 minute rule. When a family member or friend catches you by phone or in some other way you can't avoid, sometimes it is quicker to address the interruption than to schedule a time to follow up. If you can respond in less than a minute, do so. If not, ask them if you could call them at lunch or after work. Then put it in your calendar! If you don't record it, you will forget and they will keep interrupting you at work and pressure you to talk with them.

10. If you have a major personal issue hanging over your head, don't constantly worry about it and let it distract you at work (or elsewhere). Instead, set aside on your calendar a specific time, on a specific day, to thoroughly think through that major issue. Then when your Think time arrives, do not abandon your thinking process until you:

a. Arrive at a conclusion

b. Clearly commit to a change or to keeping the status quo for the next 3 months unless something major comes up.

Rethinking your life every day is a destructive form of worry and can be very distracting to your work. Instead schedule your personal think time every three months, and make the best decision you can. Then go about turning the outcome of that decision into the best it can be.

Pick a few of these tips and put them into practice. Doing so will reinforce that when you are at work you are at work. Your friends and family will realize that when they help you stay in focus at work, you are more fully with them when you are at home.

They will know that you plan time to really listen to them and when necessary schedule meetings to discuss personal issues. As a result there's less need or desire on their part to interrupt you at work. You will eliminate many of the unnecessary mental attacks from unresolved personal issues that can be so distracting to your professional productivity.

And you will be much less tempted to let C level personal priorities draw you off the harder to think about, higher A work priorities.

Right now, open up your calendar and put in times and reminders for when you will implement the tips you have selected. You will get more done at work, and in the process create less distracted, more rewarding and enjoyable time at home.

Make it happen!

Jim Bird
Publisher

E-Tip: Type of Planner & Size That Works Best

Your planner should be a size you find convenient to always carry with you for immediate notations. Use a planner/pda that provides you with at least a one page view per calendar day as well as 12 full monthly view pages. You need room not just for appointments for the day, but notes and reminders. Electronic and paper planners each have their own distinct advantages that you may prefer. Electronic planners sync up with other computer based calendar systems, provide automatic reminders and are quicker for transferring items between dates. Paper is quicker for entering information and is easier to view both your appointments and notations for a date. The most important thing is to use some type of daily/monthly calendar for both work and personal decisions and commitments.