

# Achieving The Elusive Work-Life Balance

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**I have personally wrestled with my own work-life balance issues for most of my adult life. In my younger adult days, I could easily have been categorized as a workaholic.**

I was divorced after a 17-year marriage and did not see the break-up coming. I'm not saying that a better work-life balance would have saved the marriage, but a poor work-life balance sure didn't help it any. For me, the integration of my work life and my non-work life has been a rough ride at times but—as a senior-aged person—I have learned a massive amount of knowledge and, dare I say, wisdom, about the highly important subject of finding a satisfactory harmony across all aspects of life. My mission here is to present you with some starter ideas that can fit into a relatively short article—ideas that can help you not only better understand your work-life balance but to give you ideas that can help you achieve the integration that is most important to you.

Work-life balance can mean something different to each of us. For purposes of this article, work-life balance is about achieving an acceptable harmony or integration between your work life—or career—and your personal life.

Studies show that a poor work-life balance can result in unhealthy levels of stress and unhappiness. At risk are your personal relationships, your career and your development as a person, to name a few. Moreover, too much time spent working has its own problems. You run the risk of burning out and hating your job, maybe even yourself. You wake up one day and realize you're not happy with your life.

What does matter is that you create a personally meaningful life that helps you feel happy and healthy overall. While balancing work and non-work life might not be easy early in one's career, figuring it out is necessary to lifelong satisfaction. Almost everyone wishes that they had realized the importance of life balance at the beginning of their career. Doing so would have meant less regrets and a more deliberate life. But whatever your age, you can still seize control and drive towards the balance you most desire.

I have created an assessment instrument—called the Questionnaire for Self-Assessing Your Work-Life Balance—to heighten your awareness of the behaviors that are affecting your work-life balance. The questionnaire will also provide a means to rate your collective behaviors and present a score that can give you insight into your effectiveness in achieving work-life balance. You can [download the PDF](#) and take the quiz now or later at your convenience.

Let's examine eight important actions and behaviors that can help you in your quest to achieve the elusive work-life balance.

## 1. Create A Vision For What You Would Like Your Life To Look Like

Ask yourself what you would like your life to look like both from a career perspective and a personal perspective and how you see these two major components integrating. Then define what you envision a typical, desirable day would look like beginning from the time you wake up until you call it a day. That day could have interaction with family members, time for exercising, eating healthy, of course time for work activities, personal chores, special events and some downtime to compose and reenergize yourself. Use this vision as a baseline to ensure that you steadfastly adopt actions and behaviors that move you towards your vision. Then define the priorities in your life that are important to support this vision—including those priorities that are non-negotiable except for emergencies; examples could be special family events, sleep and exercise. The bottom line is that in order to improve upon your work-life balance it is essential that you have a vision of what you would like that integration to look like. If and when you would like to create a vision, I have created a [sample vision](#) to give you an idea of what a vision could look like.

## 2. Set Your Priorities Each Day

At the start of each work day, create a to-do list that includes the identification of your top three priorities to focus on for the day. If you have timeframes available of 30 minutes or more, do not work the bottom items of your to-do list, focus instead on the top three. Your top three items are so important that they define your overall value, contributions and success in your job. Work off your top three priorities every 2-3 days and replace them with your next set of priorities. If your top three priorities may take weeks or months to resolve, then, within 2-3 days, put a detailed, trackable plan in place to deal with the priority. Then remove that top-three priority from your list and routinely track your new plan until it is complete.

If occasionally you experience a day that is so hectic with fire fights and please handles that you never get around to working on your top three priorities, that's okay; you work in a complex, demanding environment. However, if you frequently have days where you do not focus on your top three priorities, then you are the problem and need to seek help to effectively manage your workload.

If your personal life is as chaotic as your work life, consider creating the to-do list for non-work activities as well.

### 3. Track Your Time

For one week, keep track of where and with whom you spend your time during your waking hours both at work and in your personal life. Record in increments as small as 15 minutes. The objective is to identify time well spent that support your priorities and interests as well as time that—looking over the big picture—was not considered put to good use. This exercise is invaluable as you look for ways to fine tune your behaviors throughout each day. Experience shows that you will likely experience some “ah-ha” moments as you look more objectively into your routine behaviors.

### 4. Limit Time-Wasting Activities And People

This action will free you to spend more time on the important activities and people, and will likely provide you with additional time that you did not realize you had. Not only will your productivity benefit, the quality of your work and the satisfaction you get from your work likely will also increase. Many people spend too much time on things that don't really matter. Time, arguably, is the most valuable commodity in life: It is the one thing you cannot buy more of. Therefore, don't waste it.

The last tip we had discussed, “track your time,” can help here. Also, as your day unfolds get in the habit of consciously questioning if the time you are about to spend or the time you just spent is, indeed, an effective use of your time. After a while, this can become second nature and you will more effectively choose the areas where you dedicate your time.

### 5. Learn To Say “No”

Ensure that your commitments mostly support your priorities. Your inability or unwillingness to say “no” can easily allow you to lose control over your day and those things that matter most to you. If you need to buy some time to think about your final decision of whether or not to say “no,” then do so—even sleeping on it. Use whatever methods will help you better control where you commit your time. If you do not seize control over the commitments you make, your time will be surrendered to others... and you will not like the impact to you. You have far more control over your day and how you spend it than you may realize.

### 6. Minimize Time In Meetings

Minimize time in meetings, especially unstructured meetings. Most people spend a large portion of their time in meetings. Obviously some meetings are important for you to attend but many may not be providing you a sufficient return on your invested time. For starters, consider only attending meetings if they satisfy one or both of these conditions: 1. Information you need to perform your job will be disclosed, or 2. You have information that someone else needs to perform their job.

If you have information that someone else needs, consider turning that information over to the dependent person before the meeting starts and don't attend the meeting. If you feel you must attend the meeting then do so only for the time necessary to disclose the information—say 5 minutes. Work with the meeting leader to determine the specific time when you should attend.

For meetings that you must attend, consider having a buddy who must also be in the meeting cover for you and afterwards inform you of what you need to know. And you reciprocate by covering for your buddy in a different meeting that you both also must attend.

## 7. Put Yourself First

Take care of yourself. Look out for yourself. Putting yourself first goes against what many of us learned growing up. But think about it: By putting yourself first, only then can you be your best and give your best to others. An example is on an airplane and the oxygen masks drop due to a potential emergency. You are directed to place the mask on yourself before helping someone in need next to you. You must make sure that you are in a position of strength before you can be your best for all that which comes your way and all those who may have a dependency on you.

Another example of putting yourself first is protecting your private time. Don't be so quick to sacrifice your private time for other work and personal events. Your private time may be essential for catching your breath, recharging your energy and reaching a level of understanding and acceptance with yourself and all that going on around you. If you have serious work-life balance issues, not putting yourself first was likely a major cause of the dilemma you now find yourself embroiled in.

## 8. At The End Of Your Day, Assess How Well Your Day Went

Pause and sit back to catch your breath. Then identify the actions you took that supported your quest for work-life balance. Give yourself some kudos for taking these actions. Also identify those actions that harmed your work-life balance. Imagine how your day could have been more productive and meaningful had you not engaged in the harmful actions. Ask yourself what you could or should have done differently so that you can change your behavior the next time a similar situation arises. See yourself incrementally growing stronger day to day, week to week.

## Closing Thoughts

You get to define what work-life balance means to you. Balance is an individual thing and everyone must find their own. It's not about what others think; it's about what you desire for you. You achieve work-life balance by first defining the balance you most desire. Then you examine your current life and decide if that balance is being achieved. If it's not, then, starting with the ideas presented in this article, you can put a plan in place that will deliberately move you into the desired direction. Then periodically revisit your work-life balance situation and adjust your actions and behaviors where and when needed.

Your work-life balance is something that can easily be put off for another day, another week, another year—but you already know that. Now is the time to seize the control over your life and to make it the life you most desire. It's possible that this article could be the catalyst to change the rest of your life. Now, become your imagined self!

*This article was published in PMTimes.com and BATimes.com by Macgregor Communications in July 2017.*