



Balancing Personal and Professional Life in the Workplace

My work is my life! If you have ever thought, heard, or said these words, be careful. Psychologist and author Dr. Henry Cloud states, “It is good that you love your work, but if it is literally your “life,” then you have either defined life in a very limited way or do not know what you are missing.

Gaining and maintaining a well-rounded life seems to be what a lot of professionals desire, but all too frequently they experience the tension between life at work and outside of work. It seems like if we consistently put too much emphasis on one over the other, the tight cable that we walk begins to split, fray, and unravel.

Obviously, working hard and sometimes long, late hours are required and equate to the income necessary to provide for those you love. However, if you are rarely balancing your time between your career and those you love, the very ones you are providing for will resent what you do!

Symptoms of Loving Your Work Too Much

The engine light (idiot light) on your dashboard comes on to indicate there are internal engine, transmission, or computer problems that, if not corrected, can eventuate in costly repairs.

The light is a simple warning device suggesting something must be done to correct the problem so that nothing worse occurs.

Below are some indicators that suggest work is out of balance and needs to be corrected:

1. When you frequently complain about your work at home.
2. When you consistently spend off hours doing work-related projects.
3. When family or those closest to you start complaining about your schedule.
4. When you can't plan or see any foreseeable time away or vacation in the near future.
5. When you have no life or leisure outside of your work.



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Notice that every one of these indicators suggests that others are impacted by your schedule as well. I once interviewed the director of an Addiction Recovery Center on a morning talk show and asked how she defined any addiction. Her answer was revealing, “An addiction is any activity that negatively impacts your personal health or those closest to you.”



Balancing Priorities Begins With...

- *A Personal Decision* – More than 20 years ago, I was a Senior Pastor of a Church in Northern California. My professional responsibilities pushed my family and marriage to the limit. In speaking with a Church Consultant, I was challenged by a phrase that would change my life and priorities to this day. He said, “Bill, no one in the congregation is primarily concerned about what happens to your family. They are just concerned about keeping the machine going. If anyone is going to take control about what happens to you and your family, it’s going to be you. No one else is going to make that decision for you.”
- *Focusing on the Big Picture* – I’ve been by the bedside of many facing death. Never, and I mean never, has anyone ever talked about their wealth, accumulations, or successful profession. Without fail, all ask for family or their closest friends to be present. I hope you love your work and have a passion for your accomplishments; anything less lacks drive and purpose, but never to the expense or loss of what’s most important in life.

• *Asking Yourself Good Questions* – On the lighter side of the discussion, here are some diagnostic questions to reflect on. I only ask that you be candid with your answers:

1. Do I have the freedom and time to develop a life outside of my work?
2. Are there any possible changes I can make to delegate or divide up my workload?
3. If change is not possible, is there anything that prevents me from feeling marketable somewhere else?
4. Are there any priorities that I need to shift around or a task that I need to say no to?
5. Can I remain loyal to my family and friends as well as the organization with my current responsibilities?
6. Is my out of balance schedule only seasonal or a lifestyle?

Final Balancing Rules for the Road

It is said that, “In life you get what you tolerate.” Below are some suggestions for change that will keep you on the balancing beam of all your responsibilities without tumbling off.

- *Start taking care of yourself.* Burned out employees are not all that efficient.
- *Be candid with your employer about your situation.* If you are a truly valued worker, hopefully your employer will care for your life as a whole.
- *Lower your unrealistic bar.* Sometimes it is critically important to walk away to your other life even if the job isn’t completely done quite to your expectations. You never know, your boss may be more encouraging for you to complete the project later so that you can tend to the important family date.
- *Learn to say no.* I finally learned at the age of 45 that, far from feeling put off, most people preferred my NO because of other pressing responsibilities than a Yes packed with regret, resentment, and half-hearted attempts to appease.