

TIPS FOR BALANCING YOUR LIFE

In this era of increased emphasis on the bottom line, more billable hours, pressure to “do more with less,” and technology’s seductive appeal to help us be accessible 24/7, it has become a significant challenge to achieve true balance between our professional and personal lives. This is especially true within the legal profession, where lawyers, administrators, and managers tend to be overachievers and “Type A” personalities, driven to please clients or customers.

Yet recent studies show that law students and young lawyers want balance in their lives. And law firm partners are finding they want balance, too. Having spent years busily climbing the ladder to success, often partners discover when they reach the top rung that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall – they are working harder than ever and still cannot find time to really enjoy their lives outside work. Their desire to sublimate their personal lives, in favor of professional advancement, is fading.

How can we achieve real balance in our lives? We must first assess our knowledge of ourselves and our priorities. Too many of us float from day to day or year to year without examining our priorities. We think we know what they are (e.g., family, professional advancement, health), but we often do not stop to rank or weigh them or to determine if we are conducting our lives in a way that gives our time and attention to our “priorities.”

Next, we need to look at the techniques or strategies we have for achieving balance. This often requires deciding to get some extra help cultivating new habits and constructing a rich and rewarding personal life that helps us be even more valuable and productive at work.

The next step is frequently the toughest – examining our level of true motivation and whether some-

thing is keeping us from giving our time and attention to our stated priorities. This requires us to examine whether our stated priorities are really the priorities *we* want. If they are, then what do we allow to interfere with our commitment to them, and why?

We may never achieve “perfect” balance, but by striving for the goal we will build richer, more rewarding lives.

Here are some tips to help you:

- **Be proactive at work and at home.** Don’t wait for things to happen “to you.” Make things happen through your own efforts.
- **Focus on things over which you have control.** Do not waste time agonizing about issues over which you cannot exert influence.
- **Assess your relationships with colleagues, peers, supervisors, friends, and family.** Strive to improve one or two challenging relationships. Do so by working from the “inside-out.” Don’t wait for the other person to change. Work on your own attitude or beliefs about the other person, trying to see things from their point of view. Consider shifting your paradigms about them.
- **If your workplace promotes a “workaholic” environment or does not value life balance, think about how you can impact that culture, working with allies in your organization.** Often, the most significant changes in organizations start at the bottom.
- **Set goals for yourself.** If you want more balance in your life, envision what that would look like. Then compare that vision to your current reality. Assess the gap between the two. What would it take for you to close that gap?
- **Once you are truly in touch with your life’s priorities, live by them.** Instead of prioritizing your schedule, schedule your priorities! Show integrity around those priorities. Make

consistent decisions in the tough moments. Keeping commitments to yourself will make it easier for you to keep commitments to others.

- **Learn to delegate.** Delegation is the most powerful tool of effective managers. Delegation helps build proactivity muscles in the people with whom we work.
- **Take care of yourself!** Too often work or home pressures take control and we neglect our own needs. This can lead to anger, resentment, and even illness. Overachievers who populate the legal profession can easily become martyrs at work. Do not fall into that trap.
- **Set goals for building a balanced life outside the office.** Examine what you are doing right now to cultivate a rewarding life – physically, mentally, spiritually, socially, and emotionally. Write down personal promises to yourself about the things you will start or continue doing to help achieve satisfaction in your life.
- **Focus on relationships, not things.** Real personal growth and happiness flow out of rewarding relationships, not from the accumulation of objects or material things.
- **Give back to your community and the organizations that are important to you.** Volunteer work can provide a sense of fulfillment that permeates all phases of our lives.

Achieving balance in our lives is a worthy goal, one of which we are all capable. If you have not realized that goal, explore your inner thoughts and feelings. Have you taken adequate time to establish your priorities? Are you drawing upon resources that will give you the skills to make change? Do you have feelings or attitudes that are holding you back? As the new year begins, take time to reflect on how you can make your life the way you want it. Remember: no one on his or her deathbed ever said, “I wish I spent more time at the office.”

Lawrence Center
Georgetown University Law Center

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