



Work/Life Balance: Coming To Terms With Our "Seasons"

Description

For years, the topic of work/life balance or work/life blend has interested me. Achieving it seems rather elusive. It reminds me of the saying, "My serenity is directly tied to my expectations."

I am not saying we shouldn't strive for balance. It is very important, and of course we all want to achieve as much balance as possible. It's just that, at least during certain seasons of our lives, we need to accept that we're probably not going to be as successful at it as we might want to be.

At such times, it can be helpful to examine our expectations around balance.

There are periods in which certain life activities may be predominant. It does not mean that a person does not do other things; it is just that at times, depending on life situations, some items will take more time. These can be education, career, personal growth, family, community, and so forth. When you are raising two small children or caretaking for aging parents, for instance, the chances of your life being balanced are slim to none.

If "balance" is defined as "equal," one can see how that expectation can lead to feeling, *My life is not balanced*. Some may define balance in terms of how hours are spent each day, or each week, or within some other time frame. This may not occur for many people.

Here is a quick look at my own life. Up until 21 years, my time was spent on education. Work was added to the schedule to help pay for college. After graduation, I spent time starting a career and family. Education was no longer front and center; instead, most hours were spent working and raising children. As the children became involved in sports and so forth, it seemed any time outside of my job was spent on kids' activities.

As the children grew older, my career was leading to more opportunities. As my pay increased, so did the responsibilities. As the children became way less dependent on my wife and me, it provided the opportunity for us to give back to the community. Today, at our ages, we could be less active in the community and in work, but we find great satisfaction in both. We continue to do community work and work in our businesses. My perception is that work/life balance is defined by the individual. I have had people say to me, "Why are you working so hard?" I feel the key is for people to do what they

enjoy. I have a neighbor who spends hours upon hours gardening. She gets great joy out of gardening.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are people who choose to spend more time in work or professional activities even when their employer is okay without them doing so. Think of the person who furthers their education. They are doing fine on the job and decide to get a master's degree. Will it help them on the job? It's possible; however, going back to school is their choice. Will it mean more hours in education than they had been spending? Yes. This is an individual's choice. There are also people who make decisions to do extra work that may not be needed in their current job in order to create a portfolio to secure a promotion or perhaps a different job.

I have met with people who shared on a survey they don't have good work/life balance and want it. We go through what they are doing. I often say, "You don't have to do what you are doing. You don't need to be at work so much." The answers are, "I want to," or "I feel I need to for my next job." Again, hold up the mirror. We make our own choices and are in charge of our own attitude about those choices.

Here are a few things I have learned from people who are happiest in their jobs and lives:

1. They have chosen a job they find joy in. The president of the Pensacola Blue Wahoos is Jonathan Griffith. He has told me he does not like it when the team is playing on the road. He loves game days. He has chosen a vocation he enjoys.
2. If they are feeling overwhelmed or feel they are working too many hours, they meet with their supervisor to research what is really a must-have and what is a nice-to-have activity. While people say their plate is full, they are often reluctant to take things off their plate.
3. They are not victims. People accept their work/life balance is more under their control than they think. They aren't stuck in that "only I can do this" mindset. They don't say things like, "The place will fall apart without me. I must do this."
4. They look at what skills they need to develop and how much more experience would help them. It could be things are taking longer due to a skill issue. For example, it may be a time management issue or a lack of experience. It is very common for people doing something new or in a new place to feel overwhelmed. The key is to seek training when needed, and when in a new situation to realize that it isn't forever. Things get easier.
5. They are not always "connected." I tell people it's okay to turn off your notifications. Sometimes technology can create distractions that keep us from being focused on what we are doing in the moment. The more we can focus, the more balanced we tend to feel.
6. They are better accepting of life on life's terms. A friend of mine ended up with custody of his grandson. It was an unexpected situation. A parent ends up needing more care than planned. A person at work is sick and will be out for a while, which means taking on more tasks. Things happen. The Serenity Prayer can be helpful.

There is no magic wand with work/life balance or blend. The decisions we make and how we handle them are very much based on the individual. It is best to realize that life has its seasons. As much as we can, we need to enjoy what each season brings, or at least learn as much as possible. This too shall pass.

Date Created

August 29, 2022

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