

CAREER CORNER

#18 IN A SERIES

Is Your Work-life Balance Out of Whack?

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FIND OUT HOW TO GET BACK ON TRACK!

The vast majority of Excelsior College students are working adults, balancing family, career, college, and community responsibilities. It can often be a juggling act at best! As work obligations, course deadlines, and family needs prevail, many wonder how to manage it all and still preserve balance and harmony in life.

What Exactly is Work-life Balance?

In general, work-life balance entails fostering the right combination of participation among all life roles. It includes the interaction among paid work, family activities, personal development, community events, favorite pastimes and hobbies. Work-life balance is a commonly used term, but has a different meaning for each individual. There is no “one-size fits all” formula. We all have different values, aspirations, and commitments that drive us, as well as our own unique methods of arranging and allocating our time. Career experts are quick to point out that the phrase “work-life balance” can be misleading; it implies a false dichotomy of two separate and equal parts—work and life. On the contrary, our lives and careers are inextricably intertwined and multifaceted. They are not so easily divided or calibrated. Developing a healthy balance between work and life is truly an individual process that changes over time, depending on life stages, goals, and the current socio-economic climate.

What Factors Affect Work-life Balance?

We live in a 24/7 society. Changing social demands, increasing globalization, shifting demographics, varying economic conditions, and rapidly growing information and communication technology options are some of the factors that significantly impact how we approach our lives and careers.

Consider a few current trends:

Changes in the workplace—Employees operate in an ever-changing, fast-paced workforce. Job mobility has increased. There are no longer jobs for life or guaranteed job security. Due to increased technology, many jobs that exist today may be reconfigured or eventually become obsolete. For some occupational fields, jobs that will be popular in 20 years have not even been created yet!

Option overload—As we attempt to balance our daily routine, we also experience an inordinate amount of choices. We can choose among an array of foods, restaurants, mobile devices, cars, movies, clothing, and more. We are offered many ways to better our health, diet, parenting,

and education. If you’re still not sure, comparison shopping is only a click away on the Internet. Although most often embraced, ample choice can also lead to arduous decision-making. Continuously discerning how to allocate our energy and resources among multiple options can create more of a drain on already overscheduled time.

Family dynamics in flux—Both single- and dual-income families in today’s society are significantly affected by the competing demands of life and career. For parents working outside the home, multitasking is commonplace as they face both child care and elder care issues. With so much to juggle, it can be challenging for working adults to carve out time for family, recreation, educational pursuits, community services, exercise, and other leisure activities.

How Do You Know if You’re Out of Sync?

We all have days when we feel a lack of control; that we’re falling behind; or out of step. However, when this feeling becomes the rule instead of the exception, we may be teetering on the edge of imbalance. For some, devoting an excessive amount of time to

work leaves little room for other important discretionary activities. Tipping the scale too far to one side can result in negative implications such as increased stress, poor health, relationship issues, job burnout, and overall dissatisfaction in life.

Get Back On Track!

Feel like your work-life balance is off the mark? Consider it an opportunity to create a workable balance. Regain a sense of control, flexibility, and gratification in your everyday personal and professional life. It's within your reach!

Here are Some Tips to Get You Started:

Assess what is important—Honestly assess your values. What do you enjoy? What do you want to achieve? Be sure to account for all your life roles. Determine how to best allocate your personal resources and energy. Focus on what your priorities are—not what others think they should be.

Set goals and establish a career plan—Explore your options and set incremental milestones. Then, take action; even small steps move you forward. Review your plan regularly and make adjustments as needed.

Organize—You will be more productive if you have a system in place to streamline work processes and life events. Keep a daily to-do list. Do what needs to be done and let the rest go.

Delegate—Solicit the help of others. Outsource activities that others can do.

Be adaptable—Allow yourself more flexibility when arranging your personal schedule. Accept the possibility that the lawn may get cut on Wednesday instead of Monday. Simplify whenever possible.

Learn to say no—Limit choices. Recognize you can't do it all. It's okay to respectfully

say no. Do you need to attend every family event and all work seminars? Don't commit out of guilt or false sense of obligation.

Nurture yourself—Maintain your energy! Carve out time for fun. Invoke humor. Set time aside for activities that you enjoy. Eat healthy. Add physical activity to your daily routine.

Find quiet time—Put white space on your calendar, and allow time for reflection, solitude, and clarity.

Use vacation time—Recharge your batteries! Take the time you are allotted by your employer to rejuvenate and relax. You may be surprised by the energy you have when you return to work.

Take advantage of employer options—Ask your employer about flexible scheduling or telecommuting. Use tuition and health promotion benefits. By increasing your control, you can diminish your stress.

Improve your work environment—Flexible schedule arrangements not an option? Look to enhance other aspects of the job. Strengthen working relationships with colleagues or seek to learn something new.

Bolster your support systems—Enlist trusted friends and relatives to help out when family and work conflicts arise. Keep a list handy of phone numbers and email addresses to access if needed.

Strike a Balance!

Many working adults aspire to succeed in the workplace without forgoing their personal lives.

Finding the right equilibrium between personal and professional roles can be a challenging but worthwhile endeavor. Your time is valuable! Make sure the way you spend your time aligns with your life goals, and you will be well on the way to achieving a successful and satisfying work-life balance.

Related Resources

Workplace Values Assessment, Arizona State University

<http://career.asu.edu/S/CareerPlan/SelfDiscovery/ValuesAssessment.htm>

Work-life Balance Quiz, Quintcareers.com

http://www.quintcareers.com/work-life_balance_quiz.html

Goal Setting and the Career Planning Process, Dawn Rosenberg McKay

http://careerplanning.about.com/od/settinggoals/a/setting_goals.htm

The Future of Work-Life Balance and Workplace Flexibility, New America Foundation

http://workforce.newamerica.net/events/2010/the_future_of_workplace_flexibility

Tip Sources

www.mayoclinic.com, www.ciainsight.com,
and Goal Setting and the Career Planning Process, Dawn Rosenberg McKay

Access this article, and many additional career-related links at the Excelsior College Career Center at www.excelsior.edu/career. Questions or comments about this article? Contact Maribeth Gunner Pulliam, Career Services Coordinator, Office of Online Education and Learning Services.