



THE TOP 5 TIPS FOR IMPROVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

by Lynne Cooper

Not many of us get close to the end of our lives and proclaim: *“I wish I had spent more time in the office.”* However, in the incredibly fast-paced, technology driven, 24/7 world we live in, vast numbers of people are finding their lives out of balance – too much hard work and not enough time for themselves.

Of all the issues that my Executive clients bring to coaching, working so hard that their personal lives suffer, is by far the most common. They often believe they ‘need’ to work that hard. Some of the many stories I hear include:

“I’m still the new guy and need to prove myself.”

“Hard work has got me where I am – from a 16-year old apprentice to running the operation.”

“If I can just keep going like this for a while longer then I am sure I will achieve [X]”

“I am not sure why I was promoted and I need to work hard to ensure I don’t get found out.”

These same clients tell me they want to stop sacrificing so much of their personal lives. Yet, their beliefs about working hard are driving them, and keeping them stuck with a work and life in-balance.

If you find yourself increasingly frustrated by the amount of time, energy and effort that you are putting into your working life, when you’d like to invest more in your personal life, read on! Here are five tips to get you started on improving your work-life balance – things you can put in place that are *not* hard work!

1. More life, less work - what’s stopping you?

What are the beliefs that are stopping you from having ‘more life’? Are you aware of them or do you need to search deeper?

Take a little quiet time to think about what is happening for you. Could the beliefs that are stopping you from getting what you want be any of the following?

Your ethics. Were you brought up to value hard work? Was hard work considered important in your family? Did you learn that good people work hard?

Avoidance. Is your home-life currently too stressful? Too quiet? Too complicated? Too lonely? Is it actually *easier* to keep busy at work?

Self-belief. Do you believe you have fewer qualifications than others? Less experience? Less honed skills? Do you think you are not really good enough?

Organisation culture. Does everyone work long hours in your workplace? Are people productive when they work so hard? Is it the right organisation for you?

Personal standards. Are you driven to work harder, faster, better in order to achieve? Are your expectations of yourself higher than others' for you? Do you have almost unattainable standards?

Something else. What is it that truly leads to you working more than you want to?

2. PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU REALLY WANT

Having done this thinking, do you still want to improve your work life balance? If so, start to define what you want more clearly.

Write down your goal or desire, in the positive. Focus on what you aspire to, rather than what you want to *stop* having, and make it specific. For example:

I would like to spend more time with my children

I would like to develop a new relationship

I would like to learn to dance salsa

I would like to be home by 7.00pm every night

Place this goal where you can see it regularly – in your diary, on a post-it note on your PC monitor, fridge, etc . You could use a picture, drawing or symbol rather than words (always useful for confidentiality).

3. The three D's - Deal, Dump or Delegate

Remember Pareto's rule – roughly 80% of our achievements come from 20% of our effort. So, how much of what comes your way should you deal with, dump or delegate?

Whether email, phone messages, projects, requests from others, or even things you 'tell' yourself to do, ask the following questions (of yourself or the originator of the work):

Who is this important for? You? Someone else? A group of other people? Nobody?

What will I gain as a result of this task being completed? Maybe an emotional gain (satisfaction, learning, fun etc)? Or maybe something more tangible, like money, or even keeping your job!

What will happen if it doesn't get done? Evaluate the consequences. How serious are they *really*?

Who else could do this? A team member, colleague or boss? Do others have the skills and/or knowledge? Is this a development opportunity for someone else? Is this anyone else's job?

Do I have everything I need to complete this task now? If you have all that you need, deal with it now! If you need more information, resources or time, plan how and when you are going to deal with it and move on.

The answers to these questions will help guide you to classify a task into one of the three Ds – Deal, Dump or Delegate.

4. Solve your *own* problems only!

How many people bring you their problems at work? Do you like to help others? Do you even sometimes have people bringing their personal problems to you?

If you have a tendency to help others solve problems, you'll almost certainly be increasing your workload. You may also prevent them from gaining the experience they need to solve future problems, creating a long-term dependency on you.

5. Take the first few steps

It may not be easy to change the pattern you have been running for a while. Yet you have already started! You've recognised that you want to make a change and you've made a commitment to starting. Why else would you be reading these tips?!

Set your goal – what you want more of in your life. Put it where you are reminded of it regularly. Your unconscious mind will develop creative ways of helping you achieve that goal.

Set aside a period of time where you can practise Deal, Dump or Delegate. Maybe an hour a day until it becomes more familiar.

And if you are normally a problem-solver, reward yourself the next time you support someone to solve their own problem. Buy yourself something, plan an indulgence, or best of all, go home early!

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