

Work/Life Balance – Discovering Personal and Professional Feng Shui

by Melanie O’Kane

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Identify Your Enemy

In order to achieve the perfect blend of work and play, we need to recognize our enemy. Stress is the physical and emotional response to an unbalanced ratio: when our responsibilities outweigh and overshadow our capabilities, resources and needs.

According to WebMD, stress can cause a host of physical and emotional responses, some of which are debilitating and even fatal. Look to these warning signs as indicators of acute (immediate) stress:

- Tension, irritability, and an inability to concentrate
- Increased heart rate and respirations
- Neck, shoulder, and back pain
- Headaches
- Stomach discomfort
- Increased sweating

Chronic (long-term) stress is the body’s reaction to overwhelming or dangerous situations over a prolonged period of time. If steps aren’t taken to eliminate the fuel that feeds this stress, the following conditions could occur:

- Cardiovascular disease (i.e., high blood pressure, abnormal heartbeat, hardening of the arteries, heart attack, and heart failure);
- Muscle pain and exacerbation of arthritic conditions;
- Gastrointestinal troubles (i.e., acid reflux, ulcers, Irritable Bowel Syndrome);
- Reproductive organ problems (i.e., painful menstrual periods, erectile dysfunction, infertility issues);
- Exacerbation of respiratory disorders like asthma and COPD;
- Worsening of dermatological ailments like acne and psoriasis; and
- Weakening of the immune system.

Tips and Tricks for Beating Stress

Set and Maintain Priorities

It’s vital that we identify and protect our priorities. Contrary to popular belief, you must put your personal priorities above everything else. If you aren’t healthy and happy, you can’t sufficiently care for others (i.e., family and clients). Decide what is important to you and protect those priorities with due diligence.

Learn to Delegate

Inevitably, the time will come when you’ll have too much to accomplish in a given period of time. To cope with this dilemma, learn how to delegate responsibility to others. Let your significant other cook

supper. Allow the kids to walk the dog. And take your mother up on her offer to do your dishes. What you'll be left with is a manageable list of tasks that reasonably can (and should) be done by you.

Acknowledge Your Humanity

Unless you can see through walls, jump over tall buildings in a single bound and shoot fire from your eyes, you are human. Humans have flaws; no one is perfect. Stop trying to appear omnipotent and get a grip. Cry if you feel sad. Laugh when you're happy. Admit when you're wrong and acknowledge your imperfections. The experience will be liberating and extremely beneficial to achieving work-life feng shui.



Develop a Routine

In order to beat stress and achieve a harmonious work-life balance, as much as possible, we must eliminate the unexpected. The best way to do this is by creating a calendar of events for your life. Have one master calendar that combines the activities of your personal and professional lives. Look at the calendar every day and update it often. Refer to this calendar before scheduling anything and do not sway from this rule. In time, a routine will begin to develop. Routine is not boring. In today's society, routine is necessary.

Hello Dust Bunnies

For many people, a clean, tidy house is a must. Some people are so obsessed with keeping a perfect home, that they spend countless hours scrubbing cracks with old toothbrushes and sucking up every last dust bunny to the point of extinction. Being an immaculate domestic deity takes a lot of valuable time! So learn to embrace your dust bunnies and stick to a manageable cleaning regimen.

Take Care of You

While working in the brick-and-mortar world, I would arise at 5:00 a.m., Monday through Friday, to shower, dry and style my hair, put on makeup, and dress in professional clothing. Now that I own a home-based business, it's easy to become lax in keeping up with this routine. However, taking care of *you* should be top priority. So develop a routine of personal hygiene, healthy and regular food intake, exercise, and sleep. There's a saying that goes, "without you, there is no me"; these are words to live by.

Safeguard Your Free Time

Scheduled and unscheduled free time is precious. Nothing short of an act of God should prevent you from enjoying it. Jack Nicholson said it best in the 1980 movie *The Shining*, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy". Free time is when you recharge your batteries and regain a sense of well-being and happiness.

Develop Business Culture

Even if you are a sole-proprietor, it's important to develop a sense of company culture relative to your ethics, values, goals, and standards. To create an effective culture matrix, think about what is most important to you as a person by developing three sets of procedural standards, which can be shared with your clients:

- A Value Statement: What items and issues are most important to you?
- A Vision Statement: What are your long- and short-term goals?
- A Mission Statement: What do you strive to accomplish in life and business?

Your Personal Safety Net

Behind every great person is an equally impressive network of supporters. Many of us don't command an entourage, but we do have people in our lives who want us to be successful. These are the people who will support us in times of need; they are the safety net under the tightrope we walk between success and failure.

Summary

To develop a successful work-life balance, define your life's purpose, and then employ tactics that will defeat stressful situations while helping you realize your goals and dreams.

Positive Coping Skills

- Listen to music
- Read a book
- Take time to "play"
- Indulge your senses (e.g., hot bath, massage, meditation)
- Deep-breathing techniques
- Be creative (e.g., write, sing, read)
- Exercise regularly
- Rely on a confidant in times of trouble
- Get in touch with nature (e.g., gardening, camping, sightseeing)

Just as importantly, avoid negative, self-destructive behaviors like:

- Self-criticism
- Bad habits (e.g., nail biting, gambling, smoking, excessive drinking, drug abuse)
- Being overcome by negative emotions (e.g., road rage)
- Unnecessary aggression (e.g., yelling, hitting)
- Overeating
- Binge shopping and gambling
- Antisocial behaviors

For more information about maintaining a healthy work-life balance in your area of the world, visit the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services <http://www.hhs.gov>.

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