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Balancing Your Two Lives (Home and Work)

Among the essential ingredients of a balanced life are meaningful activity, physical and mental health, satisfying relationships and peace of mind. To achieve that balance, you must successfully juggle the demands of your work, personal life, family and relationships.

"If you're spending too much time working, and your personal time disappears, it's likely you'll become exhausted, stressed and irritable," says Bee Epstein-Shepherd, Ph.D., a psychologist in Carmel, Calif. ♦ "Each of us has an average of 112 waking hours a week in which to satisfy all of our responsibilities. The more successful we are at completing our work and taking time for ourselves on a regular basis, the more often we'll feel satisfied and in control of our lives."

Professional balance

Dr. Epstein-Shepherd says you should do three things every morning to start your workday with a sense of balance and purpose:

- Eat breakfast.
- List your daily goals.
- Determine your top priorities to plan your day.

"When setting your goals for the day, ask yourself, 'If only one thing could be done today, which activity would it be?' The answer should be your top priority," she says. "To build your list, ask yourself, 'If only one more thing could be done today, what should it be?' It's best to prioritize your list according to importance, not how easily a task can be completed."

You may find you feel out of balance when your workspace is disorganized. The following organizing system can make it easier for you to find things you need when you need them:

Arrange a specific place for files and tools and put them back after you use them.

Don't use your desktop for storage. It should hold only those items you use every day.

Create a workable filing system to avoid paperwork pileup.

Use color coding. It makes any item easier to find.

Don't save everything you think you might need someday. Clutter makes it more difficult to find what you really need.

During the last 10 minutes of every workday, make a list of what you have accomplished. "Give yourself credit for what you get done each day, and you'll go home with a sense of completion instead of frustration about what you didn't get done," Dr. Epstein-Shepherd says.

Then, outline what you need to tackle tomorrow.

Finally, make a list of the work-related problems you could be taking home. "Then tear up the list and throw it away to rid your mind of unfinished business and worries," she says. "Doing so will help you make a clean transition to your personal and home life."

Personal balance

The greatest challenge for many of us is to carve out time for ourselves despite the unceasing demands of work, family and relationships. "But it's imperative you make time for rest and relaxation," Dr. Epstein-Shepherd says.

Begin by setting aside the equivalent of an hour a day in which you do things you want to do. You can schedule that hour before or after work. Treat these appointments with yourself with as much respect as you would a meeting with a client or supervisor. Studies have found that people who take time for physical and mental rejuvenation accomplish more and are happier than those who don't take the time.

Creative people often get their best ideas while taking a walk, gardening or taking part in activities not related to work. "People who use their evenings, weekends and vacations for personal rejuvenation are more energetic and productive at work and play because they're living a life that is in balance," Dr. Epstein-Shepherd says.

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