

JUGGLING HOME AND WORK: BALANCE NOT BLAME

WRITTEN FOR: ADIA & PM NEWSLETTER

4-5-06

“Happiness is not a matter of intensity, but of balance and rhythm as you move through the next moments of life and the next.” Thomas Merton 1955

1. Do you feel overwhelmed?
2. Have you recently experienced a period of weight gain or loss?
3. Are you tired when you wake up? Do you have difficulty falling asleep or wake in the night unable to return to sleep?
4. Do you feel irritated, angry, and impatient?
5. Do you experience headaches, back pain, or gastrointestinal disturbances?
6. Do you feel resentment toward family or office team?
7. Do you need to have an “adult beverage” to sleep or unwind?

If you answered yes to any of these questions you can consider yourself a “normal” stressed out American. Look around you at the number of stressed out people – talking on cell phones, honking horns, frowning, etc. The American Institute of Stress notes that 75%-90% of visits to primary care physicians are for stress related complaints. IF you have multiple yes responses, it's time to create balance!

As females, society has socialized us to be caretakers without teaching how to take care of ourselves FIRST. Statistically speaking, daughters, mothers, grandmothers, and wives provide four-fifths of the unpaid care giving in the United States. We are in a helping profession. We care for our patients under stressful situations - anxious patients, keeping on schedule, etc. The demands of the office combined with our personal life can lead us into unhealthy behaviors IF we don't create balance.

Try these suggestions for improved balance in your life.

1. Allow quiet time each day just for YOU. 78% of adults say they wish they had more time to stop and smell the roses. We all need down time to disconnect from people. This may be a 15-30 minute early morning “me time”, a quiet retreat alone during lunch, or after work prior to facing the demands of home. Place a Do Not Disturb sign on your bedroom door and teach your family to respect your quiet time.

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2. Practice Gratitude. When you express gratitude and appreciation, your brain cannot be stressed at the same time. Instead of sending out messages of martyrdom, resentment, or cynicism, try this simple exercise. Upon waking, give thanks for another new day – it's better than the alternative! As you walk through your home take a moment to appreciate special things in your home, the aroma of fresh coffee and the hug of your pet, and/or loved one. Upon arriving at the office, focus on what you appreciate, rather than dreading that one undesirable task or patient scheduled. Generously give compliments. Few people feel appreciated. Watch the magic when you express appreciation.
3. Delegate. In the U.S., women work 76-89 hours a week, including housework, childcare, and employment. It may seem easier to "just do it myself". Efficiency is highly overrated! From the toddler to teenager daily contributions to an efficient running home can be developed together. That means you may have to be tolerant of towels being folded "incorrectly". Housekeeping police are only a myth. We may have to become more tolerant of someone performing a task less efficiently than we do at the office to reduce stress and resentment.
4. Exercise. According to the Surgeon General 30 minutes of aerobic activity a day can lengthen our lives, control stress, reduce excess body fat, and improve sleep. AND, it doesn't have to be done at the same time. If you can connect with nature while exercising, you have the added component of connecting spiritually with mother earth. Feel, touch, breathe, and smell what is around you.
5. Laugh! Find humor in something everyday. Laughter improves oxygen flow and creates endorphins.
6. BREATHE. Hold a pleasant thought in your mind. Place your hands on your belly and slowly inhale to a count of 7 while your belly expands. Hold for 4 seconds and slowly exhale for a count of 8 while your abdomen collapses. Once you become aware of deep breathing, be aware of your breathing throughout the day. Breathing deeply reduces muscle tension, heart rate, and blood pressure.

In conclusion, I leave you with a couple of my favorite quotes.

1. "Permitting your life to be taken over by another person is like letting the waiter eat your dinner". (Vernon Howard)
2. "Only you can make your mind up! You're the one and only one!" (Dr. Suess)

Finally, if all else fails – hire a housekeeper!

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This article is an overview of a lunch and learn session presented in February at the ADIA & PM Winter Symposium in San Diego, CA.