

Basic Steps Toward Work-Life Balance

Labor Day, Monday, September 7, is not just a holiday to celebrate the end of summer. It was inaugurated by the Knights of Labor in 1882 and made a national holiday by the U.S. Congress in 1894 to honor the American laborer. And, honor he and she deserve! But, during these difficult times, when staffs are short and work is piling up, how do you achieve balance? How about considering these steps from the Mayo Clinic. The goal is to make time for the activities that are the most important to you. (www.mayoclinic.com/health/work-life-balance)

Keep a log. Track everything you do for one week. Include work-related and non-work related activities. Decide what's necessary and what satisfies you the most. Cut or delegate activities you don't enjoy and don't have time for. If you don't have the authority, talk to your supervisor.

Take advantage of your options. Find out if your employer offers flex hours, a compressed work week, job-sharing or telecommuting for your role. The flexibility may alleviate some of your stress and free up some time.

Learn to say no. Whether it's a co-worker asking you to spearhead an extra project or your child's teacher asking you to manage the class play, remember that it's OK to respectfully say no. When you quit doing the things you only do out of guilt or a false sense of obligation, you'll make more room in your life for the activities that are meaningful to you and bring you joy.

Leave work at work. With today's global business and the technology to connect to anyone at any time from anywhere, there's no boundary between work and home—unless you create it. Make a conscious decision to separate work time from personal time. When with your family, turn off your cell phone and put away your laptop.

Manage your time. Organize household tasks efficiently. Doing one or two loads of laundry every day, rather than saving it all for your day off, and running errands in batches are good places to begin. A weekly family calendar of important dates and a daily list of to-dos will help you avoid deadline panic. If your employer offers a course in time management, sign up for it.

Rethink your cleaning standards. An unmade bed or sink of dirty dishes won't impact the quality of your life. Do what needs to be done and let the rest go. If you can afford it, pay someone else to clean your house.

Communicate clearly. Limit time-consuming misunderstandings by communicating clearly and listening carefully. Take notes if necessary.

Fight the guilt. Remember, having a family and a job is OK—for both men and women.

Nurture yourself. Set aside time each day for an activity that you enjoy, such as walking, working out or listening to music. Unwind after a hectic workday by reading, practicing yoga, or taking a bath or shower.

Set aside one night each week for recreation. Take the phone off the hook, power down the computer and turn off the TV. Discover activities you can do with your partner, family or friends, such as playing golf, fishing or canoeing. Making time for activities you enjoy will rejuvenate you.

Protect your day off. Try to schedule your routine chores on workdays so that your days off are more relaxing.

Get enough sleep. There's nothing as stressful and potentially dangerous as working when you're sleep-deprived. Not only is your productivity affected, but you can make costly mistakes. You may then have to work even more hours to make up for these mistakes.

Bolster your support system. Give yourself the gift of a trusted friend or co-worker to talk with during times of stress or hardship. Ensure you have trusted friends and relatives who can assist you when you need to work overtime or travel for your job.

Seek professional help. Everyone needs help from time to time. If your life feels too chaotic to manage, and you're spinning your wheels worrying about it, talk with a professional.



For confidential individual, marriage and family counseling, you can call the ICC at 281 363 1633. Our therapists have daytime and evening hours. There is no charge for employees and family members of participating companies.