

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Tips and Techniques for Achieving Greater Balance in Your Life

How do you maintain your sanity and regain control over your life when you're being pulled in all directions? It's a problem many of us can identify with as we struggle to balance the never-ending demands of work, family, friends, and personal needs.

When you give yourself permission to stop trying to be superwoman or superman and instead identify and focus on your priorities, you take the first vital step to a more balanced life. Although it may be tempting to blame outside forces for imbalance in your life, taking control of your own destiny is key in achieving the balance you seek.

Self-Assessment

Begin by reflecting on the attitudes behind your current choices in life. Here are some questions to ask yourself to begin the process of self-awareness and get on the path to a more balanced and fulfilling life:

- Do you crave the kudos that go with being superman or superwoman?
- Do you feel guilty if you say "no"?
- Are you afraid you will lose face if you say "no"? (at work, with family or with friends).
- Do you feel that if you don't do something, it won't get done properly?
- Are you a perfectionist?
- Are you hooked on “being busy”?
- Have you forgotten how to relax?
- Are you afraid of making changes in your life?

Attitude Adjustment

Once you recognize that it isn't realistic for you to be able to do everything, you’ll learn to set your priorities more easily. Remind yourself that when you prioritize, you can give more of yourself to each thing you do, which can ultimately be beneficial for everyone. Here are some tips to help you ease into your attitude adjustment:

- Determine to go with the flow—you'll do what you can and will try not to fret over things undone.
- Learn to ask for help, and to accept help in the office and with family responsibilities such as child care or elder care.
- Recognize that perfection isn't always the right goal. A quick and casual family supper that you can relax over with the family may be more valuable than preparing a three-hour gourmet dinner that leaves you a wreck.
- Accept that things will go wrong sometimes—and that's what life is about. It doesn't make you a failure if the children have a fight or your partner misses a promotion.
- Learn that it really is O.K. to say "no."

Reducing the Load
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When it comes to achieving balance in your life, there are ways for you to cut back on your commitments, so that you're not spreading yourself too thin. Here are some suggestions:

- **Reflect on alternatives for items that you consider low priority.** For example, would the school care if you bought cookies instead of baking them? Are there social activities you go along with but don't enjoy?
- **Consider whether you could pay others to take over some of your chores.** A cleaner? A gardener? A student to shovel the snow or clean your windows?
- **Consider if others could share family responsibilities.** An older relative's neighbor or friend to run errands occasionally? Another family member to check in on sick or elderly relatives on the weekends? A friend to trade babysitting nights or shopping chores?
- **Reflect on whether you are delegating your time effectively at work.** If your workload is too heavy, problem-solve with your boss to come up with ways to make your task list more manageable.
- **Create an action plan to achieve balance.** Listing all of your goals in priority order will help you visualize what needs to be done, and in what order. You can then assess your action plan and make modifications as you go.

Finding Time for Priorities

Now it's time to make room in your busy schedule for the important people and tasks in your life. First, reflect on the "wasted time" in your life—killing time in front of the TV when you aren't even enjoying it, chatting at the cooler in the office, or shopping every other day because you keep running out of things may not be the best uses of your spare time.

Aim to get your priority tasks out of the way first by staying organized. Lump chores together and get them over with at the start of the weekend. Make a list and shop just once a week or less, or if you can afford it, consider using a grocery delivery service to give you more time at home.

Consider scheduling time with your partner into your day planner. Make a dinner date or a night at the cinema. Book time for a walk in the park. And don't forget to make "appointments" to do things for yourself like read a book or learn a new skill. Treat them as seriously as you do work appointments.

Also consider sharing "bulk chores" with a friend to gain social time. Cook mega meals and split them into freezer portions. Bulk shop together and split the quantities. Weed his or her garden together, and do yours next week.

With your busy lifestyle, it can be difficult to balance tasks and time effectively. However, by focusing on your priorities and learning to limit your tasks, you'll find that achieving balance can be easier than you thought.