

Wellness Tip Sheet

The keys to work-life integration



When it comes to blending our work and life commitments, there are 5 key areas we need to address: energy, work, personal interests, family and relationships, and our values or inner purpose.¹



Stress management

“There’s no such thing as work-life balance. There are work-life choices, and you make them and they have consequences.”

– Jack Welch

A mind for blending

How do we connect our work-life choices to these five factors that make us happy and healthy?

To begin with, we need to adjust our thinking. There are three mindsets that can make or break our sense of work-life harmony. In summary, they are to do with the way we recognise values, time and change.

Reconnect with your values

To achieve a sense of harmony from our work-life blending, it’s critical that our activities align to our personal values and what gives us a sense of purpose.

A great place to start is to:

- Make a list of the things you value and ask yourself, how well do my daily and weekly activities express or fit in with these values?
- Identify your character strengths and ask yourself how well your work life choices are playing to these strengths – this can help inform your priorities; take the free, positive-psychology-based via character survey at www.viacharacter.org
- Consider a daily mindfulness exercise in which you remind yourself of your purpose and the things you cherish and

acknowledge and be grateful for what steps you’ve taken so far.

Adjust your view of time

When struggling to make or meet our commitments, we often use the limitation of time as an excuse, rather than use the time we have as a tool to make positive progress.

- Rather than wish you could have more time in your day, make a commitment to yourself not to waste the time you have
- Think of effective time management as being more about seizing moments and less about squeezing what you can out of your available hours
- Focus your best efforts on the moments that matter most (this should be easier once you have reconnected with your values).

Embrace change and relax some control

It’s helpful and more realistic if we can embrace the changing circumstances and events that challenge us. This involves accepting the things we can’t change. We simply can’t be in two places at one time, for instance.

A big part of this is about letting go of some control. The need to control everything tends to come with an unrealistic need to do it all yourself, a focus on commitments that don’t really matter, and negative feelings and self-talk when things resist your control.

Relaxing control takes practice. It helps to:

- Talk to colleagues, friends or family about any challenges you’re facing; a problem shared is a problem halved
- Identify areas where you could benefit from task- sharing or collaboration

- Use your moments of mindfulness to reflect on and relax your grip on the things that are stretching you; commend yourself and be grateful for the efforts made to date.

Taking practical steps

Getting into the right frame of mind puts us in a good position to start making adjustments. Now that we are better prepared, let's look at some practical steps we can take to help improve our work-life integration.

It goes without saying that planning and scheduling your activities can be a tremendous help when we are feeling stretched or overwhelmed.²

Scheduling is not simply about attaching a time limit to our priority tasks. It's about pausing and asking yourself "where can I make the most meaningful use of my time?" and looking for overlaps where you can potentially meet commitments back-to-back or in unison.

◦ Consciously plan your days

Take 10 minutes each morning or at the end of the day to plan your activities; if you are not keen on planning, simply start by listing in your mind 3 things you want to achieve today.

◦ Consider your options before committing

It's often helpful to pause and make a decision not to commit to anything new under pressure. Instead, you could respond to requests with something like: "I have a number of priorities I'm handling at the moment, but I can look into your request at my earliest opportunity."

Whatever you decide to commit to, it's important to take the time to reflect on how the decision will impact your work-life integration as a whole.

◦ Share or delegate tasks

Think about what can you share, alternate or collaborate on to make things happen in a simpler and swifter manner. Find a friend or colleague to share these tasks with. This is how we blend work and life.

◦ Discuss some flexible options at work

You may also wish to discuss with your manager some ways you can continue meeting your work commitments more flexibly (for instance, through starting earlier and finishing earlier). Likewise, communicating regularly and realistically at home about your work commitments can help you avoid common sources of tension in your personal life and to achieve a greater sense of harmony.

◦ Unplug to recharge

Now that work and play are both conveniently in our hands with us wherever we go, for some of us, our total daily amount of screen time (spent viewing our devices) has risen significantly. This can not only distract us from our commitments to ourselves and others, it may also disrupt our sleep.³ You may find it helpful to set aside some days, weekends or afternoons, where you completely switch off from devices and see where it takes you.

◦ Take some breaks

As we get busier, a consequence of letting work blend into our personal time and space is that we may find ourselves always. Setting firm boundaries is an obvious solution, but this can be difficult to implement for some of us. Try instead scheduling small breaks in your day and use those breaks wisely. This can re-energise you.

◦ Fuel your body

It's helpful to make mindful choices of what you put into your body in order to keep up your energy levels. Drinking more water, eating a varied, balanced diet, and avoiding skipping meals are all vital. Try to leave your desk and move around every one to two hours, either to get a glass of water, go to the toilet or just stretch. This will move blood and oxygen around your body and help to revitalise your brain.

◦ Make the most of your downtime

A mind always on-the-go tends to be restless during those 'downtime' occasions when it finds itself doing nothing. Rather than fill these moments with worry or with meaningless tasks, take these moments to reflect or meditate on what's most important to you, or to just be present in the lives of those close to you. Far from being a waste of time, all of these things can be restorative to your energy levels and concentration, and promote feelings of calm.


References

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2. Friedman, S.D., 2005. Four studies of executives helping employees align their actions and values. International Journal of Leadership Education, 1: 29-30.
3. Green A et al. Evening light exposure to computer screens disrupts human sleep, biological rhythms, and attention abilities. Chronobiology International. Vol. 34, May 26, 2017, p. 855.

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