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10 Steps to Achieving Work-Life Balance

The term work-life balance is often misunderstood to be the attainment of perfect equilibrium between our work obligations and personal lives and commitments. In actuality, work-life balance is a philosophy where we determine the required time needed to properly prioritize the efforts put towards career and ambition against the energy and activities dedicated to lifestyle, including family, leisure and pleasure.

Work life-balance is an individual measurement and may vary daily, monthly, and over extended periods of time. The right balance will differ as your lifestyle changes. Your needs and wants evolve throughout the various stages of life, from being single, to being married, to the possible addition of children or new career aspirations, and to nearing retirement. There is no perfect formula or ideal balance to strive for. The right equation differs because each individual has different priorities, goals and lives.

According to Statistics Canada, a lack of work-life balance costs Canadian businesses a combined 20 billion dollars a year in health claims, lost productivity and absenteeism. (1) A reported one-quarter of the population currently works 50 hours or more per week, a rise of 50% as compared to a decade ago. (2)

Impacts of poor work-life balance

If you experience prolonged periods of time without work-life balance, it may have adverse effects on your mental and physical health. Several studies have shown that working long hours for extended periods of time have led to occurrences of physical and mental ailments including cardiovascular disease and depression. (3)

Anxiety and Depression are amongst the most common mental health disorders for those who do not have work-life balance. As a result, fatigue, absenteeism, lower productivity and organizational turnover rates tend to increase.

Sleep is another key foundation to healthy living. If your sleep is impacted over long periods, it can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. Adequate sleep in addition to diet and exercise lowers your risk of cardiovascular disease. Make time within your schedule for each.

Other symptoms of poor work-life balance include:

Mental Ailments

- Feeling a lack of control, forgetfulness, trouble concentrating, and nervousness
- Irritability, insecurities, lowered self-esteem, substance addiction
- Mental and physical fatigue, weak coping skills

Physical Ailments

- Weakened immune system
- Backaches, migraines, headaches, and stiff muscles
- Sexual health problems and weight gain

Here are some suggestions on how to improve your work-life balance:

1. **Set your priorities.** Begin your workday by prioritizing objectives that need to be accomplished by the end of day. Ask yourself, “If I need to focus on one thing today, what would it be?” Identify your top five priorities for the day. This method of prioritization can be practised in short to long-term timelines, for life, work, relationships, or health goals.
2. **Concentrate on one thing at a time.** Successful multi-tasking is a rare and difficult feat. Many of us struggle with successfully focusing on two tasks at once. Instead, devote your full attention to the task at hand. When you are working, focus on working only. Concentrating on a single task will allow you to complete it more quickly, with fewer errors, and affords you the time and concentration to engage more deeply in your remaining objectives or priorities.
3. **Track your time.** Ask yourself, where you spend most of your time. Track how you are spending your time for one week. How much time do you spend doing the things that matter to you the most? Do they align with your work, life, relationship and health priorities? Eliminate things in your life, or delegate where possible if they don’t align with what matters most.
4. **Respect your personal and private time.** We often require an emergency to reschedule an important work meeting, give your personal time the same respect and priority.
5. **Take a look at your routines and general lifestyle.** If you lack sleep, eat poorly, and don’t exercise, this can cause you to feel out of balance in your life. Your efforts to prioritize and achieve personal time can all go to waste when you aren’t treating your mind and body well. Ensure you get enough sleep, eat a variety of nutrient-rich foods (i.e. salmon, kale, garlic, blueberries, eggs), and try to exercise three times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes (i.e. cardio, light lifting, stretching). By adopting a healthy lifestyle, you can help to maximize your efforts in obtaining work-life balance.
6. **Set boundaries.** Given today's technology, it’s easy to blur the lines between work and personal life. Turn off your cell phone and laptop when having family dinner, ask friends or family not to interrupt your workday unless it’s an emergency. By setting boundaries, we enable ourselves to focus on what matters at specific times.
7. **Ask for support and learn to say “no”.** Speak to family, friends, colleagues, and managers. Share your goals and communicate your efforts in working towards a healthier and more balanced life. Be prepared to answer questions on how they can help you achieve your plan. When at capacity, don’t overwhelm yourself by taking on more. Have a discussion and ask for support.
8. **Get plenty of exercise.** It may seem counterintuitive to add another activity to your life, but exercise has been shown to relieve stress, clear one's mind, improve one's mood and energy, and ultimately, helps to make you more productive. You will find that your new sense of invigoration will help you get through your day and welcome work with renewed positivity.
9. **Find a mentor.** Do you know someone you admire, someone with the career or lifestyle you want to emulate? Ask their advice on career and educational development. Learn how they establish goals and priorities, and how to best manage your time to achieve career and lifestyle goals.
10. **Evaluate your work-life balance on a regular basis.** To achieve work-life balance, you embark on a continuous journey of evaluating your needs at different points in your life. You need to set aside time every month or so to reflect on your current efforts. You’ll need to determine what you would like to achieve in the coming months, and amend your plan to achieve your objectives.

Achieving work-life balance takes effort. It is important to practice work-life regularly to keep yourself on track with what is important in your life at that moment. With continued practice, you can create a roadmap to a life with less stress and more focus on what’s important to you.

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<p>6</p>  <p>Set boundaries</p>	<p>7</p>  <p>Ask for support and learn to say "no"</p>	<p>8</p>  <p>Get plenty of exercise</p>	<p>9</p>  <p>Find a mentor</p>	<p>10</p>  <p>Evaluate your work-life balance on a regular basis</p>

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