

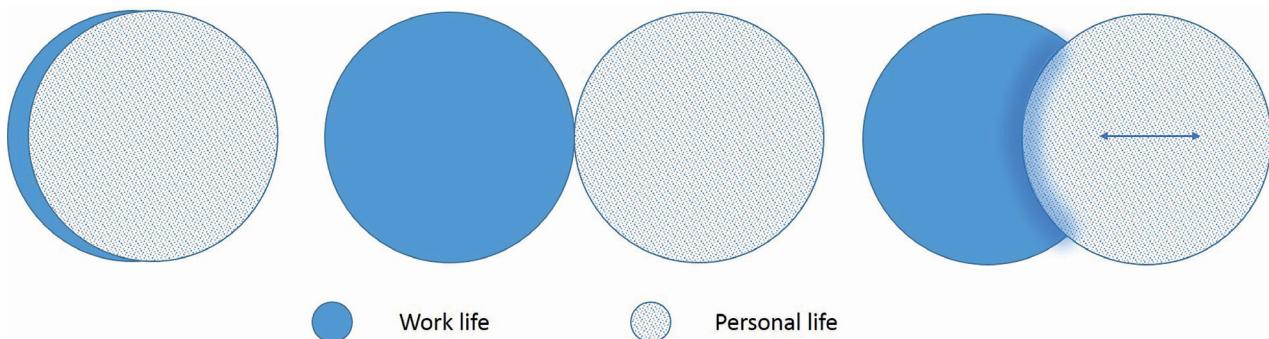
Editorial

Becoming a Better Person While Achieving a Satisfying Work-Life Balance – Mythology?

The concept of maintaining a “healthy” balance between being “successful” in both one’s work and personal life is a familiar mantra. A quick search on the Internet demonstrates that there are many and varied opinions as to what is meant by a work-life balance. We may expect that there is a generational, cultural and geographical influence at play. Further, and not to place too fine a point on it, but one’s opinion as to what constitutes this balance may not actually reflect one’s ultimate priorities. To clarify, when faced with a serious either/or situation, I am convinced that most people will choose their personal life as their highest priority, likely because their loved ones are most profoundly involved with this aspect of their being. For the sake of this commentary, let us consider that a good work-life balance means that a person is satisfied with their achievements and has an overall sense of enjoyment of life. I am pretty sure that attaining this state also makes us better people. So how does one get there?

While I think this discussion relates to anyone, I will focus most of my thoughts on academics in dental education/research and oral health practitioners. With due consideration to the inescapable administrative duties that typically accompany these professional activities, we find ourselves engaged in a constant battle to find what we consider to be this “perfect” balance. The path is different for each person, based on their own abilities, ambitions and perceptions of personal success. For some, there is almost no separation of work life and personal life in their normal day, as if there was a nearly complete overlap in their existential Venn diagram. For others, there is a distinct separation between the two lives, perhaps attributed to what they have established as an inviolable chronological guide. In either case, the person likely feels fulfilled, at peace, and generally joyful about their situation.

But the situation is not always so clear, and most people in our professions find it a difficult and arduous journey to reconcile the emotional tug-of-war. The final outcome, usually the result of years of “trial and error”, is a diagram with a blurred and dynamic boundary between our work and personal life, the position and fuzziness varying by day, week, month and year. It may be hard to sustain the “satisfied life” state, often leaving one second guessing their choices, typically due to many strong and important influences from internal and external forces.



The key to achieving the “satisfied life” likely depends on several important qualities, including acceptance, flexibility, and responsiveness. One must accept that there is no such thing as the “perfect” balance, and endless striving for it is only likely to result in perpetual frustration, especially because one’s sense of “perfection” changes relative to both time and personal need. One must be flexible, and capable, to modify behavior to accommodate an ever changing environment and its many requisite demands. Finally, one

must be responsive to others whose own personal journeys intersect with ours and require our consideration, as much as ours do theirs. For all of these qualities and needs, I personally find indispensable the guidance, love and forgiveness of a power far greater than any living human, and I am certain that my own quest would have resulted in despair in the absence of a strong faith in God. While I accept that not everyone shares this same opinion, and that others may be able to find this satisfied life without spiritual influence, I am sure that they will not be able to do it without embracing the realization that “success” can only be achieved through dedication and hard work. Thus in achieving the balance, we cannot help but become better people. But is it really possible, or is the work-life balance just a myth?

In our lives, we all have come upon many people, and hopefully a majority, that seem to have achieved the balance. Therefore, we know that it is not a myth, but is actually a very tangible and achievable reality. Even if the balance is not omnipresent and obvious, it can be sustainable over the long haul, if we are accepting, flexible, and responsive. In past times, the process of getting to the stage of having a work-life balance was called “paying your dues.” It was generally accepted that in both aspects of your life, you had to work very hard, devote considerable time and energy, experience a certain amount of personal sacrifice, do all of the little jobs, and eventually work your way up to the point where you could call yourself a “balanced” success. In today’s world, opinions differ widely as to what constitutes personal sacrifice and hard work, and how many dues one needs to pay before there is a reasonable expectation of achieving this balance. But if I can be indulged to provide some advice at this point, I would say that if one is truly attempting to find the most satisfying route to the attainment of a work-life balance, one should avoid the path of least resistance. Perhaps this is unfortunate, but most likely not. Most likely the route to a satisfied and fulfilling personal and professional life is demanding. It always has been, and as it should be to make it truly meaningful and lasting. There are no quick fixes. So here are a few tips, for use, or not, as the reader sees fit. They may not ensure that you achieve the balance, but if followed they will guarantee that you will be a better person for the effort.

1. Go the extra distance, every time you have the chance. No matter how unimportant it seems at the time, try to do more than everyone else. Always.
2. It is all about relationships. So always be considerate and remember to treat others with respect. It is the right thing to do. But in addition, you will need help at many points along the way, and people are much more willing to help a good person, and rightfully so.
3. Don’t sacrifice your integrity. Without your integrity, the rest is pointless.
4. Take some chances, even if it places you far outside of your comfort zone. Be willing to test your personal limits, and push them further.
5. Finally, no matter what happens, don’t give up. Don’t ever give up.

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