

Balancing Act

15 Tips for Managing Life at Work and Home

No gimmicks, no tricks. Just basic advice for getting the most out of the time you have without letting it get the most of you.

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Behavior experts say that it takes 21 days to change a habit. But these days who's got that kind of time? If you've resolved to find a way to live a more balanced life this year, perhaps the following tips will give you a jump start. You can begin tomorrow, or even right now, by trying just one tip. No organizers, Palm Pilots or prior planning are required. You should see results immediately. Of course these tips aren't the type to substantially change your life, but they will give you more control of your day and, with that under control, you'll have more time and energy to devote to making some lasting changes.

At work

1. If at all possible, physically close your office door for a period of time each day (start with just 15 minutes) so that you can review your charts, return telephone calls and have some quiet, uninterrupted time to handle administrative matters. Explain to your office staff what you're doing so that they'll understand.¹
2. When you have a project, estimate the time required to complete it, and double it to accommodate interruptions. If you finish early, you will have found time that you didn't know you had.²
3. Continually ask yourself, "Is this the best use of my time?" Even better, ask yourself, "Does doing this require a medical degree?" If the answer is "no," delegate it.
4. If you don't already, group your telephone calls. People are usually in their offices right after they arrive at work in the morning and right before they leave in the evening. Try making and returning calls during these times of the day.¹
5. Reduce the amount of time you spend socializing at work by learning polite ways to end conversations. Try saying, "I would really like to talk to you about this, but I've got to meet this objective today, so would you please excuse me?" If necessary, schedule a more appropriate time to talk.¹
6. Any time you're faced with a task that will take less than two minutes to complete, do it immediately.
7. Ask yourself, "Would anything terrible happen if I didn't do this?" If the answer is "no," then don't do it.³

At home

1. Get up early. If you get up an hour early for one year, you will have created about 10 additional weeks of time. Use it to your personal advantage, perhaps as quiet time alone to reflect.⁴
2. Try not to think of work on the weekends.³
3. On your days off, do something very different than you do during the work week. Make it a point to master new skills and learn new things about the world outside of medicine. Well-rounded people are more content both professionally and personally.
4. Try to eliminate the word "stress" from your vocabulary for a few days. Instead substitute words like "stretched" or "challenged" and see if you notice a change in your emotions and responses. For example, saying "I feel stretched by all of my time commitments" makes it sound like you're more in control than saying "I'm stressed out by all of my time commitments."⁵
5. Dispose of items that you seldom use. Caring for possessions requires space, time, energy and money. Ask yourself, "What will happen if I let go of this?" If the answer is "nothing," get rid of it. Every time you decide to buy something new, ask yourself whether you really need it or if you're just buying it because it looks interesting. For every item you buy, get rid of two you don't use.⁶
6. Set your watch and the clocks in your home (and office) three to five minutes ahead to build a small cushion of time into your day.³
7. If you do your journal reading at home, keep your journals in a basket or some other limited space. When the basket gets full, throw away the oldest material whether it's been read or not.⁶
8. Ask yourself, "What is the one thing I can do today that will make the biggest difference in my personal life?" Then try to do it.

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