Wealth Enhancement®

Reclaim your time: finding the right work-life balance

The “work first, life second” mantra guides many of us these days—from driven entrepreneurs to ladder-climbing professionals to overcommitted parents. One result: little to no time for family, friends, spouses, self-care, and other vital parts of living our best lives.

If you are consistently putting work or volunteer projects at the top of your list and then attempting to find the time for “the other stuff,” here’s some advice: Stop looking for that time—it doesn’t exist.

The good news: You can *make the time* to create a meaningful, fulfilling life and find the work-life balance that eludes so many of us.

Add through subtraction

The things you *don’t* do can be just as important as the things you do. Rather than adding the latest “secret to happiness” into your life, look for ways to trim existing fat. For example:

1. Eradicate what you hate. There will always be necessary aspects of life that you don’t enjoy. But there’s a fundamental difference between necessary evils and unnecessary tasks that drain your reservoirs.

   At work: If you have weekly meetings or reports you produce that aren’t necessary or could be done less frequently, lobby to make those changes. You may be surprised by how much control you can exert over your workload.

   At home: Which of the most time-intensive tasks you truly dislike in your personal and family life could be outsourced to others? Would freeing up the time you work on your landscaping, for example, enable you to accomplish what you most want in life?

   Even if you can’t eliminate everything you hate, you can probably reduce the frequency you have to do those tasks.

2. Stop doing things no one should do. We all take steps in our lives, careers, or businesses that don’t generate meaningful results. What

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obligations have you taken on in your professional or personal life that are unproductive and shouldn't be done?
Identify these activities, eliminate them, and invest those extra hours into work that matters, your well-being, or time with people you value.

At work: Eliminate those "meetings to schedule meetings about scheduling meetings." Instead of surfing the web when you're bored, get up and take a walk or do deep-breathing exercises.

At home: Stop checking your email or social media "just one more time" before bed. And stop cleaning the house before the cleaners come because you don't want the cleaners to see the house when it's not clean!

Non-negotiables: build walls, boundaries, and bumpers around your time

Non-negotiables are nonwork activities that excite and recharge you and that you commit to doing no matter what. Without non-negotiable boundaries, you risk getting stuck in a pattern of perpetual workaholism and finding yourself mired in an endless list of tasks and to-dos.

The reason: Instead of taking the promises we make to ourselves seriously, we often negotiate with ourselves. ("I know I said I was going to exercise today, but I just feel so tired … I think I'll skip it today and do it tomorrow." "I said I'd prioritize time with my significant other, but I have a lot on my plate right now, so let's push date night to next month.") But once you set your non-negotiables, there is no more mental negotiation.

These are two of the most significant benefits of setting these non-negotiables in your life:

1. You eliminate the need for discipline. If you are strategic with your commitments, they can become cornerstone habits that make everything else in your life easier. Ask yourself: What are the things you struggle with most weekly, and how can you intentionally set non-negotiables to eliminate that struggle and make success automatic?

   Example: If you struggle with binge eating late at night, setting two non-negotiables such as "I eat at least four meals with 30 grams of protein during the day so that I can stop eating at 7 p.m." and "I do not keep junk food at my house" may make success more likely.

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2. You set up bumpers to keep you out of the gutter. Do you and your partner or family members talk about the dates or adventures you want to go on together—but it's always "just talk"?

   The solution: Put your commitments on the calendar and set up painful consequences for failure. If your non-negotiable is a date night every Wednesday at 6 p.m., let everyone know that you will not be available during that time and why—this creates pressure to keep your word. Or buy a giant mason jar and agree to put $5 into it anytime you or your spouse talks about work after 8 p.m. (And agree to donate the money.)

Such non-negotiables can serve as bumpers to keep your life (and relationship) out of the gutter—just as bumpers at the bowling alley help keep the ball moving toward the pins. Start by focusing on making initial non-negotiables in four categories:

- One health non-negotiable ("I will do some sort of physical activity for 45 minutes at least three times a week.")
- One relationship non-negotiable ("I will take my spouse/partner on a date night every Thursday at 5 p.m.")
- One business non-negotiable ("I will take business calls and meetings only after 11 a.m. so I can devote the first two to three hours of each day, when I do my best thinking, to sales and marketing strategies.")
- One personal non-negotiable ("I will wake up no later than 6 a.m. every day.")

Remember: No one else will fight for your time and energy as well as you can. Ask yourself if it's time to make some critical changes in your life to reclaim your time and strike the right balance between work and life.

- The Dent Team

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