

## MEETING PLANNING 101

# Work-life balance: A few tips for getting there

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A few weeks ago we talked about what was involved in trying to achieve a work-life balance, and that it involved mastering **six components**. Today we get more specific about each of those components.

## 1) Self-management

Self-management can be challenging, especially when it means getting proper sleep, exercise and nutrition. Self-management means recognizing that your resources, time and life are finite. It means becoming captain of your

own ship. No one is coming to steer for you. Here are some hard truths, and tips:

- Don't shortchange yourself on sleep, nutrition or other vital aspects of health and still believe you're at your best. In the short term, you can make do in a crunch period. Long-term, you're cheating yourself, your employer, and probably your family and friends.
- Do make the most of your time by exercising regularly, and hence, being at your best more often. Obviously you should follow the advice to check with your doctor before starting any exercise or weight-loss program.
- Do maintain a sense of balance and control by choosing from this smorgasbord of possibilities: Read one new book every month that's not in your field; spend time playing games like Scrabble with your children to help develop their vocabulary and love of words; enroll in a community college course that interests you; sign up for a lecture series; watch a documentary instead of a feature film.

## 2) Time management

Effective time management involves making optimal use of your day and any supporting resources that can be summoned. In other words, you keep pace when your resources match your challenges. Time is best managed by setting appropriate goals and determining what is both important *and* urgent versus important or urgent. It means knowing what you do best and when, and gathering the tools you need to accomplish a specific task. Examples:

- When you decide that, for example, that each Tuesday will be a normal workday, where you'll leave work at a decent hour, you automatically become more focused about what you want to accomplish that day.
- Sustain the habit of leaving work on time by starting small. Decide that on every Tuesday you'll stop working on time and take no work home with you. After freeing up Tuesdays for an entire month, perhaps add Thursdays. In another month, add Mondays. In the fourth month, add Wednesdays. I'm assuming there's no way you'd work late on Friday.
- Take a real-world approach to your time, your life and what you're likely to face during a typical workday. Consider how to approach the predictable impediments to leaving on time on Tuesdays. Rather than treat an unexpected project, dumped in your lap late in the day, as an intrusion, stretch a tad to view it as something else. You got the project because you were trusted, accomplished or, in some cases, simply present.

## 3) Stress management

Societies tend to become more complex over time. This means stress is inevitable. More people, more distractions and more noise require each of us to work at being tranquil and be able to work ourselves out of pressure-filled situations. Most multitasking increases stress; focusing on one thing at a time does not.

Some tips:

- When you feel stressed or overwhelmed, ask yourself who created the situation. Often you'll discover that you did. Of course sometimes the boss lays a bombshell on your desk and you're asked to do more than usual. It's your responsibility, still, to head off this threat. Acquire resources, training, or know-how that will enable you to handle tasks that come your way.
- With all its distractions, the traditional workplace is a terrible place to get things done. It's often better to work at the library, in the conference room or on a park bench. This is especially true when you're doing conceptual or breakthrough thinking, when you need to have quiet space.

## 4) Managing change

In our fast-paced world, change is a constant. Managing change means making periodic and concerted efforts to ensure that the volume and rate of change at work and at home does not overwhelm or defeat you. Keep these thoughts in mind:

- If you've been alive for 25, 35, 45 years or more, it took that long to become who you are and you're clearly perfect at it! You're probably not going to be able to change in 35 minutes or 35 hours or even 35 days. Cut yourself some slack.
- Whenever you start to make changes that are too big a leap from your current way of doing things, they won't last or be effective.

- Likewise, if you manage others, the most effective way to help people change is to offer them bite-sized tasks with which they will have a high probability of success. If you try to change too much too quickly, the change won't take hold.

## 5) Managing technology

Effectively managing technology means ensuring that technology serves you, instead of abusing you. Technology has always been with us, since the first walking stick, flint, spear and wheel, but the rate of change is accelerating. Often there is no choice but to keep up with the technological Joneses. But you must rule technology, not vice versa. Here's how:

- Adopt new technology only when your organization requires it, your clients use it or you see strategic, competitive advantages.
- Making new technology part of your work routine is smoother when you employ the basics. That means 1) Follow directions. 2) Take one step at a time. 3) Assess where you are every couple of steps. 4) Once you assess and determine you're on the right path, continue.
- New technological capabilities comes at you at a breakneck pace, and that pace will accelerate day after day for the rest of your life. Avoid being overwhelmed by not biting off more than you can chew. Sometimes slowing down is the best response. Then you can figure out the best way to proceed.

## 6) Managing leisure time

This is the most overlooked element of the work-life balance. Short-changing rest and relaxation is dangerous; they're critical to the quality of your life and work. A caveat: Too much of the same leisure activity can lead to monotony. So effective leisure management means varying your activities. Here's how:

- The notion of preparing for leisure might seem foreign to you at first, but it makes sense. The last time you took a big vacation, you marked it down on your calendar, and perhaps reserved airline tickets or hotel accommodations. Undoubtedly you discussed the event with your family or with friends. You made plans, wrote notes and spent money, all in preparation for this time away. Mentally and emotionally you geared yourself to the reality that it was coming. The same process works with everyday leisure.
- If you're committed to having more leisure in your life, be vigilant in your initial efforts. It takes guts to buck the norm in a society of frenzied, exhausted overachievers. In this situation, it's too easy to believe perpetual exhaustion is normal and acceptable.
- When it's time for your leisure activity, be there, experience it and immerse yourself. Let this activity be as important as any other. Let go of your left-brain, eyes-on-the-clock, my-career-is-everything predisposition. If you're shooting baskets, shoot baskets. If you're hiking, hike. If you're meeting with the garden club, meet with the garden club. If you find yourself wishing you were elsewhere during the leisure time you've scheduled, change the activity. Do not shortchange the time you devote to leisure.