

Balancing Act

By Christine Loomis

Yes, it's possible!

Over the past several decades the workplace has changed dramatically. With change has come unprecedented levels of stress and workers who feel that their lives are seriously out of balance.

Many jobs today don't fit the 9-to-5/weekday schedule, and most are dependent on a crushing level of multitasking and time commitment. Our free time, what little there is, may not remotely coincide with the free time of our spouses, kids or friends, making it hard for us to relax and reconnect in any of the traditional ways.

Even if our good intention is to de-stress in a yoga class or meet up with our spouse for a date night, the relentless advance of technology—both the boon and bane of modern existence—makes it easy to get sidetracked and sucked back into work.

No longer does walking out the office door put work behind us. With the proliferation of laptops and smart phones, the boundaries between work and home have disappeared. We can be reached any time, anywhere, from anyplace in the world—and that's not always good for our health or happiness.

So what can we do? Turns out, quite a lot. Researchers from a variety of different fields have studied issues related to work-life balance, and their findings provide hope. One thing that almost everyone agrees on is that the power to create balance in our lives is primarily in our own hands. To quote an Eagles song: "So often times it happens that we live our lives in chains/And we never even know we have the key."

We can unshackle ourselves from our desks, computers, iPhones—even our bosses and clients—if we choose to. In doing so, we will be healthier and find increased pleasure and meaning in other areas of our lives.



Pause, Breathe

That's often harder to do than it sounds. Yet one strategy that makes a huge difference in how we feel and how productive we are is short and sweet: Simply take a few minutes a few times each day to sit back and relax. **Jeff Davidson, executive director of the Breathing Space Institute in Raleigh, N.C.**, is a noted expert on work-life balance and has written prolifically on the subject. In his article "Peace of Mind for Meeting Planners" he says, "Perhaps the biggest obstacle to having what I call 'breathing space' in your life—the ability to elect on occasion to simply drop back and punt—is the unwillingness to allow yourself to have it."

Many of us mistakenly believe that if we take time away from work, we're slacking off, and work will suffer. But Davidson says that the opposite is true. When workers pause for a minute or two periodically during the day, take time to get centered and balanced and take a deep breath, they are actually more effective.

"Some of the most productive and energetic people in history learned how to pace themselves effectively by taking a few 'time outs' each day," Davidson says, citing Thomas Edison and Buckminster Fuller as examples.

Mind Game

As **Davidson** makes clear, sometimes the inability to find balance is not in the steps we do or do not take, but simply in our minds. He says the dreaded "G" word—guilt—often plays a part in a lack of balance. People feel guilt when they're at work because they're not at home, and guilt at home for not tackling tasks brought home from work.

Thier puts it this way: "Life and work get out of whack when a person thinks she has to serve two masters 100% and alone."

We can't give 100% to work and family at the same time, and trying to do this leaves us feeling frustrated and guilty. If, however, we separate the two, we can focus 100% on one at a time, and we'll be more efficient, productive and less stressed. Multitasking sounds like a good thing, yet often it's just the opposite.