

Are You Working to Live, or Living to Work?

By Laura Stack

Workplace balance is tough to achieve, because most employees have a real commitment to both their jobs *and* to their families. They love their work lives and their personal lives, often with equal vigor, and don't want to give up either. But many professionals find it difficult to participate fully in one area without sacrificing the other. If you have trouble with your personal/professional equilibrium, then these ten tips are for you.

1. **Allocate time according to your values and the top priorities in your life.** Assess whether you're spending your time in ways consistent with what's important to you. Other people should be able to look at your life, observe what you do, and tell what you value.
2. **Achieve your ideal life balance.** This is one place in life where you shouldn't accept "close enough." If tomorrow were D-day, what would you regret not having done? What fulfills you emotionally, psychologically, physically?
3. **Set appropriate boundaries and stick to your guns.** Learning to set boundaries is critical if you want to increase your personal productivity. Setting limits is a way of defining who you are and what you're all about; what you will do and what you won't; what's acceptable to you and what's not.
4. **Stop thinking about work at the end of the day and enjoy your personal time.** Do your best to get everything done by the end of the day, but if you can't, draw a line in the sand. Don't apologize for making a clear distinction between work and personal time.
5. **Ask for help when you need it.** You can't do it all. Surround yourself with a good team, so you can draw upon their resources when you encounter trouble.
6. **Create rituals and fond memories with your family.** Connect with those you love during family trips and events, and use those experiences to reconnect during stressful times. Remember: quality time trumps quantity.
7. **Spend appropriate amounts of time with electronic pursuits.** Don't go overboard watching television, playing video games, or surfing the Internet, especially when you've got a family to enjoy. Set yourself some reasonable limits.
8. **Turn off the technology when you're with family or on personal time.** Instead of letting laptops, PDAs, pagers, and phones take over your life, turn them off and be fully present when you need to be.

9. **Take full advantage of company wellness and family balance programs.** You'll be more productive when you don't have to worry about the health of your family, which is exactly why most companies offer these programs.
10. **Consistently leave work on time.** Commit to getting out the door on time. Ignore informal rules that make no sense, start meetings well before quitting time, and be assertive about your need to leave at a reasonable hour. Start small if necessary.

You can't devote 100% of your energy to your job, no matter how much you try -- or how much your boss would like you to. To be a complete, well-rounded human being, you need to focus some of your attention on other things that are important to you: your family, your religion, your hobbies, and especially your core values. Otherwise one of these days you're likely to look up and wonder who you are, and how you got there -- and why it's so lonely.

© 2009 Laura Stack. Laura Stack is a personal productivity expert, author, and professional speaker who helps busy workers Leave the Office Earlier® with Maximum Results in Minimum Time®. She is the president of The Productivity Pro®, Inc., a time management training firm specializing in productivity improvement in high-stress organizations. Since 1992, Laura has presented keynotes and seminars on improving output, lowering stress, and saving time in today's workplaces. She is the bestselling author of three works published by Broadway Books: *The Exhaustion Cure* (2008), *Find More Time* (2006) and *Leave the Office Earlier* (2004). Laura is a spokesperson for Microsoft, 3M, and Day-Timers®, Inc and has been featured on the CBS Early Show, CNN, and the New York Times. Her clients include Cisco Systems, Sunoco, KPMG, Nationwide, and 3M. To have Laura speak at your next event, call 303-471-7401. Visit www.TheProductivityPro.com to sign up for her free monthly productivity newsletter.