

5 Secrets to Achieving and Maintaining Work-Life Balance

January 16, 2015

By Craig Cincotta

In a world where more and more people find themselves working in roles that could be considered “always on” jobs, how do people achieve and maintain work-life balance and how do companies and leaders promote this way of life? It is a challenge to say the least.

Every day millions of people wrestle with these questions. At the same time, leaders wrestle with the solutions. It is a hard issue to reconcile because the answers vary.

As a manager and member of the leadership team at home-improvement network Porch.com, helping people find work-life balance is something important to me. It is something I didn't always possess or believe in.

There were times when I was the poster child for bad-balance behavior. I once had a sign in my office that read “never leave for tomorrow what you can get done today.” I was king of the 3 a.m. emails and I wore my 20 hour days, seven days a week work ethic as a badge of honor. Then a funny thing happened. I realized that I could be a much better leader, employee, manager, husband and friend when I took the time to focus on achieving balance. I found that I was living a happier, healthier, and more productive Life. And my output wasn't comprised.

To help entrepreneurs, managers, and employees strike the right balance, here are five ways to achieve and maintain life-work balance. There is no one size fits all approach, but hopefully, these tips will lead to productive discussions for managers and employees.

1. Be open about your needs. I believe that the first thing people need to do is identify what truly matters to them and communicate it. Don't hide it and don't expect others to guess what makes you feel balanced and fulfilled.

Do you need to leave work at 5 p.m. so you can have dinner with your family? Do you need to step away at 12 p.m. to attend a yoga class? Whatever your sweet spot is you need to find it and be transparent about it. Employees need to have an open dialogue with their managers

and managers need to understand what works and what is possible. Different jobs require different approaches, but everyone can benefit from having an open and honest conversation about what balance means.

2. Respect boundaries. You cannot achieve your balance if you don't respect the boundaries you have put in place. It will be hard in the beginning but you need to stick with it so you develop a routine and drive a culture and lifestyle of predictability. You will find that there is also something else you can do. There is always another email to reply to or a problem to work, but you need to PERSONALLY respect your boundaries. If you don't then you can't expect others to respect them.

3. Understand what really matters. Over the years I have seen too many people spend too much time working on things that don't really matter. Time is the most valuable commodity in life: it is the one thing you cannot buy more of. So, don't waste time. Focus on what really matters. What really moves the needle for the business? Are you working on priorities that drive the overall goals of the business or are you just making noise? Really scrutinize your day and max it out every hour, minute and second to focus on the most important outputs. For some this may require a high degree of planning and structure.

4. Embrace the off button. Pretty much every piece of technology has an off button, so use it. It is not easy and for many people this is the hardest thing to do. To get started, do it in phases. Don't bring your cellphone to the dinner table. When you are on vacation, be on vacation. Don't bring your tablet to the beach. Once you have done it a few times, it is easier to push the boundaries. When you unplug and step back you will start to experience one of life's greatest treasures -- perspective. You will think about problems you are wrestling with greater clarity. You allow yourself the freedom to be more analytical and less emotional when you step away and think vs. just diving in and responding in the moment.

5. Pace yourself. To have a long, healthy, productive, and happy life and career you need to understand the value of pace. There are times when you need to throttle up and there are times when you can throttle down. Self-awareness is crucial. Doing so will help you enjoy the journey as much as the destination.