

GET BALANCE IN YOUR LIFE

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**HOW TO BALANCE YOUR LIFE AS A
BUSY, STRESSED-OUT INDIVIDUAL**

CLIVE BOYETT



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Foreword

Never before in the annals of history did the human being have more money and less time available. The Industrial Revolution attempted to create more free time, by mechanizing production functions, but soon humans started to work harder than before, trying to squeeze more production out of machines in order to make more money.

The computer was again supposed to perform many functions previously done by humans, do them much faster than humans ever could, and so free up more time for humans. But yet again, people started to work even harder than before, utilizing the power of computers to make more money for them.

Over the past decade or two, work intensity has risen sharply and shows no signs of slowing. Many individuals now work shorter hours but work faster, giving rise to the situation where over half of developed countries' workers are working at high speed and to tight deadlines during at least one quarter of their working time – not very good for their health.

The characteristics of modern society are a combination of long working hours, stress, bad diet and lack of exercise and can lead to an excess of health-related problems.

Yet, we feel pressurized to have it all – a big house, two smart cars, a career, and a family. But people need to review these demands in life and decide what their priorities are. If things like good health and good family relations are at the top of your list, you will have to learn how to balance your

life. You may think you have no choice - but you actually do if you have the courage to make that choice, or adjust your lifestyle to get the most out of it for yourself and your family's benefit.

This book is a guide to help you find that right balance between your work, family and personal life so that you can live a longer, healthier life full of joy and fulfillment.

The Author,

2009

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1. Introduction

“It’s good to have money and the things that money can buy, but it’s good, too, to check once in a while and make sure that you haven’t lost things that money can’t buy” ~ George Horace Lorimer ~

There was a time, in the not-so-distant past, when families were expected to give up everything in order to achieve the financial security they craved. Perhaps you remember those decades, perhaps you are too young to recall those times.

Those were the days when climbing the corporate ladder was a revered activity, and wives and children gazed fondly at pictures of the breadwinner in order to remember whether poor, exhausted Dad had blue eyes or brown.

Large companies moved employees from one city to another, like pawns on a chessboard and, if you had any hope of climbing the ladder toward upper management

positions, you packed up the wife and kids and moved on from Chicago, to Boston, to New York, to Tokyo.

In the intervening years, the divorce rate climbed, fathers lost touch with their families and died of heart attacks and strokes at an alarming rate. When these men retired, they felt useless and unproductive.

Over the years, the identity of these men had become inextricably tied to their success on the job. New retirees found themselves wondering who they were, and why they were living with women who were complete strangers to them. And, whatever happened to those darling kids who used to live in the house?

Then women entered the workforce in earnest and joined the rat race.

Lest you think that this rat race has come to an end, look to the evidence of stress related death and illness, an increase in the average number of hours worked by employees in the U.S. and around the world, skyrocketing numbers of divorces and children in single-parent families.

And, let us not forget those of us who are responsible for the care of aging parents.

We live in a world of conveniences that were designed to give us more leisure time. But, it would seem that all the informational overload, whirring computers and media blitz has given us is more time for work.

It is not unusual for men and women to work sixty or seventy hours per week on average. Some of us work eighty or ninety hours without batting an eyelash. And, we fool ourselves into thinking we have a life!

If you are one of the enlightened few, you have already come to the conclusion that giving up a social and family life is too great a price to pay for career success.

Maybe, you have stress related health problems, perhaps you are not eating right, and you are probably fighting with your spouse, boyfriend or best buddy because you spend too little time with the people you care about most.

You probably can't find the time to return phone calls or send a birthday card to your Aunt Betty.

It doesn't matter if you are a lineman for a utility company, a pizza delivery girl, a corporate executive or an aspiring dancer.

In today's chaotic world, it is a safe bet that you don't have enough time for work, family and friends. And, since your boss holds a tight rein on your paycheck, it is likely that your family and friends are the ones that suffer.

2. You Are NOT Alone!

“The be-all and end-all of life should not be to get rich, but to enrich the world” ~ B.C. Forbes ~

Did you know that the Society for Human Resource Management has reported that 76% of American workers are considering looking for another job and, further that they estimate there will be 22 million new jobs created over the next ten years, but only 17 million new workers available to fill these jobs?

While every generation of workers has a different set of work expectations, the desire for work/life balance has become one of the foremost goals of every generation in the workforce today.

Baby Boomers are reducing work hours and many ‘Thirty-Somethings’ are starting their own businesses in order to have more control over their lives and schedules.

A recent study done by the Families and Work Institute illustrates that young workers just starting out in the work-

force are choosing to turn down promotional opportunities to achieve greater work/life balance.

Why do you suppose these apple-cheeked, enthusiastic job entrants might take this approach? In a study done with young employees by Families and Workplace, work/life balance was among the top for both genders.

Most of these young adults were raised in families where both parents worked and they experienced the sacrifice and demands placed upon their parents, firsthand.

Not surprisingly, of all the generations in the workforce today, these young adults are the most likely to consider job flexibility and schedules when they look for a job, and it is key to employee retention for companies that employ these young workforce.

The point of all of this background information is to let you know that you are not alone in your desire to find balance.

All generations in all types of jobs are today, looking for balance, less stress, and more time with family and friends. Like you, these people are willing to give it their all when they are at work and they expect to work hard, but in exchange, they want a life.

In essence, YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

If you think that work and family life balance is a small problem, you may be interested to know that, in addition to the few companies that have recognized the issue and taken the lead in establishing life balance programs, there are numerous organizations, foundations, universities and groups doing research on this topic.

Organizations as diverse as religious groups, government agencies, human resource companies and behavioral scien-

tists now study these issues and, not just because it is the right thing to do.

There are real economic advantages to companies that recognize the need for life balance and create a working environment to help their employees live their lives more fully.

Companies spend a lot of money training and keeping employees and happy employees will stay longer, live longer and contribute to the company longer.

But, we are just scratching the surface in understanding the true human toll that an unbalanced life takes. Many have studied the evolving societal issues and their roots in overwork and lost community connections.

If you WANT more balance in your life but you wonder whether it is all that important, let's talk about the reasons you NEED this balance.

“We are coming to understand health not as the absence of disease, but rather as the process by which individuals maintain their sense of coherence (i.e. sense that life is comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful) and ability to function in the face of changes in themselves and their relationships with their environment” ~ Aaron Antonovsky ~

Health – Living an unbalanced life where work dominates can significantly affect your health. Long or stressful work hours can cause problems with your heart, your blood pressure, and your sleep cycles.

Studies show a significant increase in heart attack and stroke since the advent of seventy-hour workweeks. Long hours at work and lots of work related travel also encourages poor diet and leaves little time for exercise.

As we become more out of shape, sleep less and experience health problems, we are no longer the powerful asset to our employers, nor can we participate fully in a family and social life.

Emotional Wellness – Your ability to give back to your family, friends and community, and your own emotional stability depends on a balanced life.

As overly dramatic as it sounds, you are likely to experience emotional problems, need counseling and suffer from anxiety attacks or other problems if you have no time to decompress and relax.

There are numerous scientific studies on the benefits of relaxation, recreation and meditation.

And these benefits are both physical and emotional.

You can't be ready to take on the issues in your family, support your spouse, parents, siblings and children and your friends if you have no emotional stamina.

If you've spent all of your focus and attention on work and you find yourself so tired at the end of the day that you don't even want to talk to your family, you have a problem. And your family may not wait around for you to resolve it!

The societal impact of 'all work and no play' has damaged and destroyed many a family and the divorce rate continues to climb. Children grow up barely knowing their parents because they are away at work all the time.

Family vacations are a thing of the past in many families. Vacations get postponed and many employees find themselves losing their accrued vacation time because they have 'rolled it over' for so many years and just NOT taken the vacation they deserved.

Your emotional reserves are depleted. You have no patience with yourself or others. You are short on sleep and even on time to think about what you want for dinner.

Is it any wonder that psychologists and psychiatrists are busier than ever?

Stress - We have talked about the health implications related to 'all work and no play' but stress is its own health factor.

Even if you like your job, if you have no time for anything else, stress will get you eventually.

We'll talk more about stress later and you'll get some tips on how to eliminate or mitigate stress so that your body and mind will be better able to handle whatever comes your way.

For now, what you need to understand is that stress can affect your physical and emotional health and that, over time, it can make you very sick. If you are not in a position to change jobs or otherwise make a major change to relieve stress, learn how to handle it better.

We're not talking about taking five years of classes here. We are talking about simple techniques you can use to help balance your life.

Remember that work/life balance is not just a question of the hours you spend in one place or another. It is also a question of how balanced you feel and how you react to things.

No matter how much time you have with your family and friends, you will enjoy it more if you are able to balance YOURSELF.

If you can become less of a victim of stress and overwork and take control of your own reaction to stress, you will live longer and be happier at work and at home.

Family and Community – Government and university studies support the idea that the ‘all work and no play’ lifestyle contributes to divorce, dysfunction in the family, and lack of involvement and investment in the community and neighborhood.

As the community grows apart and neighbors become strangers, emotional and family support for things like childcare, help with aging parents and support following trauma and tragedy become real issues.

The community turns to the government to supply services to fill this gap, taxes rise and people remain strangers.

Families struggle with alternating schedules, and children fail to thrive emotionally and physically.

Divorce is rampant and single parents are under even more stress with even less time to pay attention to children. So, things deteriorate even more!

Role models for marriage, relationships and juggling time and family are important to a child’s adult relationships. If we do not provide those positive role models, we perpetuate the problem.

It is interesting to note that the generation of children now in the work force has started to rebel against jobs and employers that require ridiculous hours and dedication beyond the call of duty.

They understand the toll this type of career takes on a life. They grew up in families that suffered this impact.

Perhaps our greatest hope for change lies in this generation of seasoned veterans of dysfunctional families.

Productivity – If your employer believes that your eighty-hour workweek is giving him more benefit, he should look at

the statistics and information gathered by human resource companies and companies that focus on efficiency and productivity.

It is a fact that the human brain needs downtime and rest and recreation to recycle. Think about your own life and the times when you had to work long hours to get something finished.

Perhaps you found that you could barely focus after a certain number of hours. There is a reason that coaches that teach good study habits tell students not to cram for eighteen hours before an exam, but rather to spread out the studying and mix in recreation.

Take a walk; talk with friends to regain your clarity and focus.

If you and your employer truly want to take the best advantage of your time, you need to take time for yourself.

You will spend less time reworking things you've done wrong, mistakes you've made and details you've missed. And your employer will get better quality and output regardless of your job.

Pilots are subject to time constraints and can only spend so many hours in the air because airlines learned a long time ago that a tired and overworked pilot could make critical errors.

In lengthy neurosurgery or heart surgery, surgeons take breaks and leave the operating room to clear their heads and rest.

Again, these habits and techniques were learned the hard way and only when critical mistakes were made did these work policies change. You wouldn't want a tired doctor working on your open heart, would you?

Life Goals – Everyone has goals. And you are probably no exceptions. You may have work and career-related goals like promotions, expanded responsibilities, and recognition as an expert in your industry.

These are all fine, but be sure you don't just focus on your job. Many people come to identify their success in life by their position in their job and the recognition they get there.

If they become disabled or sick, or if they retire, they suddenly find that they don't know themselves anymore.

They have no identity at work so they don't know who they are. They may have lost family and friends or have become strangers to these people, unaware of the important events that happened at home while they were at work.

So, they have to get to know themselves and their loved ones all over again. For some, this is an impossible task.

Be sure you set personal goals, family goals and general goals in your life for growth and happiness.

Whether it is going on for a Masters Degree in the fine art you love, learning how to fly a plane, or playing the piano, you should have goals that keep you involved in other parts of your life.

While you are setting goals, don't forget your family goals. Perhaps you have always wanted to take your wife to Hawaii. Set the goal and a timetable and do it!

Remember that life goals can include giving back to the community and to others.

It is interesting to note that, since so many people cannot achieve their personal goals because of career obligations, we now find it difficult to get baseball coaches to volunteer their time, or to get people to volunteer in hospitals and

work for the community as a volunteer ambulance driver or firefighter.

3. It's Time to Take Action

“This strange disease of modern life, with its sick hurry, its divided aims” ~ Matthew Arnold ~

Now that we've discussed the reasons why work/life balance is important, and you know that others feel as you do, what do you do about the problem?

You may hate what has happened to your life. But, you probably don't know how to change the landscape. You will be happy to know that you CAN change your life.

Whether you make this decision for health reasons, relationship reasons or simply out of the need to get control over your own life, you have more than enough justification and motivation to make the move.

However, you need to make a firm commitment to this change. Be realistic about how fast and how far you can go with this plan.

But, let's be clear about something! What we are talking about here is not quitting your job and hoping that someone will donate money to the cause.

There is a real difference between achieving balance in your work and family life and the idea that you don't have to work at all.

Work is part of life, and it is healthy and constructive. It pays the bills; it gives us the reward of real accomplishment and feeling of useful participation in the community and in society.

What we are talking about here is the rational balance of your work and social life – a balance that is all too rare in today's society, and one whose absence has caused sky-high healthcare costs and a dramatic increase in stress, psychological and relationship problems.

Now that we are clear on the goals and reasons for work/life balance, let's continue!

If you've decided to jump off the merry-go-round and seek some occasional solace with your family and friends, you must have a plan for your escape.

First, and foremost, you must set goals! Involve your boss, co-workers, friends and family in the process and keep the lines of communication open, and you'll end up where you want to be.

Sounds easy, doesn't it?

Depending on your age and how long you have run the rat race, you may find it harder than you thought it would be but with perseverance and the right support network, you can succeed.

Are you ready? Good!

Then, without further ado, let's proceed!

4. 'The Career' Versus 'The Job'

"The one who adapts his policy to the times prospers, and likewise that the one whose policy clashes with the demands of the times does not" ~ Niccolo Machiavelli ~

Before you decide to tell your boss that you simply must have more time off to spend with the family, you'll need to consider a few things.

First, most large companies now support balanced life plans – in other words, they recognize the need for their employees to take vacations, take time off to go to the doctor with a sick child, and get home for dinner at a reasonable hour.

But, in some companies, that commitment is lip service only. In other words, what the human resource policies say is one thing. The reality is quite something else.

In smaller companies, all bets are off!

Some companies are so small that they are not subject to government regulations regarding hours but it is important for you to know that there are labor laws to protect you.

The first thing you need to do is to understand your rights. If you live in a country other than the U.S., you will have to look at the labor laws there to determine what you can expect when you go to talk to your boss.

Remember, the better prepared you are, the better chance you will have at getting what you need. If your boss does not know the law, you'll need to be prepared to educate her.

Before you begin to execute your plan to balance your life, you'll want to think carefully about your job, and your career goals.

You'll find some thought-provoking considerations below.

Think carefully about each of these things, and add your own considerations to the list, if you have some that are specific to your own job.

If you really want balance and change in your life, you have to plan for it and then carefully execute the plan with dedication and persistence.

Here are some things to consider:

- Are you a member of a union? If so, there are rules regarding your work hours and these must be enforced. You can talk to a union steward to get help with this.
- Do you have a contract that requires you to work certain hours? If you do, you may have to change jobs to get the balance you want in your life.