

Red Spot Coaching

Careers Newsletter

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Work-Life Balance: It's All About Choices

Remember the news stories about people suing fast-food companies because *they* had made them fat? Or the friend who hasn't taken a holiday from work in years? Or how you keep saying, "I just don't get enough sleep?" Choices, it's all about choices.

Each day we make choices that influence our pace and quality of life, and many of these are unconscious. While it's a good thing we don't have to think about *every* little choice we make, when it comes to creating a balance between our work-related activities and the rest-of-our-life activities, it's a good idea to wake up and smell the proverbial coffee. Otherwise, we can find ourselves living with the effect of our choices such as feeling overwhelmed, out of control, or unhealthy.

Research on work-life balance shows us a picture that's probably not too surprising: We work while we're on vacation. We call in with a fake sick day just to get a breather, reflect, or catch up on sleep. This kind of a lifestyle can lead to physical and emotional illness. That's not what employers want or what any of us want individually. It's a lifestyle that becomes a sort of trance state and one that's hard to wake up from, if we're lucky enough to realize or believe that we can.

William James, pioneering American psychologist and philosopher, opined in a letter to H.G. Wells in 1906 that our "exclusive worship" of success and money was "our national disease." Over a hundred years later, we seem to be suffering from the same illness as Americans.

Better work-life balance though, is high on the priority list for many workers, especially the generations following the Baby Boomers who see quality of life as a top priority, not monetary compensation. Companies are starting to realize the benefit of providing actual work-life balance training for their employees making this an increasingly hot topic in board rooms. But the sovereign architect of the quality of our work-life balance is, and will always remain, you and me. It comes down to the choices we make. Every hour of every day. To slow down ... or to speed up. To take time to smell the flowers ... or not. It's not that one or the other is good or bad. It's about making *conscious* choices with an awareness of what's needed or wanted at the time. To live in a way that allows us to be present to ourselves, to our lives, and to others.

There was a photo once in a magazine ad that showed a father and little son in ski outfits on the slopes, with big smiles on both their faces. The caption read, "No one ever looked back and wished they'd spent more time at work." As you contemplate your own work-life balance or imbalance, know that it *is* possible to build a balanced relationship between the two if you are willing to take the time to examine your current priorities with honesty, craft a plan for changes and implement it, and remember that small changes often yield big results. It's your choice.

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