WORK-LIFE BALANCE FUNDAMENTALS

NAVIGATING THE HIGH DEMANDS OF YOUR CAREER

work

life

Table of Contents:

BUSINESS
NEWS DAILY
Small Business Solutions & Inspiration

Is Work-Life Balance a Myth?

Credit: Agorohov/Shutterstock

While many employees are searching for the perfect balance of work and home life, there is a clear divide on whether it is actually attainable.

Slightly more than half of Americans believe you can succeed at work, make a good living and contribute to your family and community, if you manage your time well and set the right priorities, according to a new study from the National Journal and the Allstate Corp. However, 40 percent think in today's economy it's an unattainable goal.

While most remain resilient in their efforts to find that perfect work-life balance, it's "clear that amid living standards that have remained essentially stagnant since 2000, many Americans are finding it an impossible puzzle to both provide for their family and participate in family life the way they'd like to," said Ronald Brownstein, editorial director for Atlantic Media.

Younger Americans and men are the most likely groups to think they can "have it all" when it comes to a positive work-life balance. The study shows that nearly 60 percent of 18– to 33-year-olds think they can succeed in balancing a successful career with family and civic commitments, with 61 percent of men feeling the same. Just 48 percent of women believe properly balancing all three facets is

achievable.

Stacy Sharpe, senior vice president of corporate relations for Allstate, said the research shows what's at the heart of what it means to live the "good life" for most Americans.

"Family, health, giving back to the community, and earning enough to pay for education and retirement, are all incredibly important to Americans' ability to live the good life," Sharpe said in a statement.

Many believe their employer should be taking steps to make it easier to achieve a successful work-life balance. Nearly 70 percent of those surveyed think that even in today's competitive economy, employers could make it a priority to give workers much more flexibility in their schedules. They think this would make many workers happier, which in turn would make them more productive.

Not all the responsibility for an improved work-life balance is being placed on employers, with the majority of those surveyed believing they should be shouldering some of the work. The study revealed that 60 percent of Americans think they can make their life better if they work hard, improve their skills and education, and provide for their families.

More charitable efforts could also help. Nearly 70 percent said that volunteering and donating to nonprofits from other citizens would also make life better.

The study was based on surveys of 1,000 Americans over age 18.

3 Steps to Eliminate Workplace Stress

Credit: Phatic-Photography/Shutterstock

Stress is a part of work. It provides the correct amount of pressure to complete a task with excellence and efficiency. When the anxiety becomes too overwhelming, however, stress follows you out of the office and affects your personal and professional lives.

While it may not be feasible or necessary to change jobs, here are a few steps to help you better manage your stress at work.

Identify the cause

It may seem simple, but identifying the root cause of your issues will help begin the healing process.

The American Psychological Association said some workplace stressors can be come from low salaries, excessive workloads, few opportunities for growth or advancement, work that's uninteresting or that isn't challenging, a lack of social support, and a lack of power over your career.

These issues can have negative physical side effects, long and short term. You may experience headaches, stomachaches or sleep disturbances; have a shorter

temper; or have difficulty concentrating. Chronic stress can result in anxiety, insomnia, high blood pressure and a weakened immune system, the APA said. Such stress can also contribute to health conditions, such as depression, obesity and heart disease. Compounding the problem, people who experience excessive stress often deal with it in unhealthy ways such as by overeating, consuming unhealthy foods, smoking cigarettes, or abusing drugs and alcohol.

Work smarter

Once you've identified some of the stress weighing on you, assess your relationships with your co-workers. Do you have friendly relationships, or do you duck behind your computer screen and avoid contact? Slight changes to your communication and work style could establish a better connection with those around you and remove some anxiety.

Socialize with your co-workers. You don't have to be a social butterfly and hit up happy hour every week, but making small talk with your colleagues might actually help you relax. Bring up light, interesting subjects and get a conversation going. This can be beneficial for productivity and stress release, said Austin Paley, corporate marketing communications manager at web-design agency Blue Fountain Media.

"You will begin to understand one another on a more individual level and work in a more collaborative environment as a result," he added.

Even just getting to know the people on your immediate team can improve your mood and help you work together better.

Projects "can be very stressful if you're working with people you don't know well," Paley said. "Lead the team you're working with through team-building exercises when you have downtime — whether it's playing a cooperative game, going out for food or just doing something you all love — together in your free time."

Unplug. Being connected via your mobile device 24/7 comes with its own set of stressors. Constant phone calls, texts and email updates have become overwhelming, especially when you're answering messages after clocking out for the evening.

Say yes more often when co-workers offer help on a big project or are willing to collaborate. This will alleviate some workload, and staying organized and on task will make for a more productive workflow.

"While there are undoubtedly instances when staying connected is legitimately necessary, it's rare for a business to require that every team member stay logged on continuously. In fact, it's in a company's interest to allow employees to recover," social psychologist Ron Friedman wrote for Fast Company. "If an associate is frequently working late into the night and through the weekend, she is likely doing so at a cost to long-term engagement."

Keep a handwritten to-do list. Staying on task with a to-do list is essential for success. In the digital age, the notion of writing out your tasks for the day might seem tedious, wasteful and unnecessary. But Paley said that a prioritized, handwritten list of your most important to-do's could help you get a clearer outline of what your day should look like.

"By having a handwritten to-do list, my tasks for the day never get lost amongst all the other things happening on my computer over the course of a day, and I don't stress out over whether or not I'm forgetting any important tasks," Paley said.

"[Writing] the list in the morning helps to outline what the day will look like and make it clearer at the beginning of the day what needs to get done. Additionally, crossing off items of your list physically can be incredibly gratifying and instill a feeling of relief and accomplishment."

Do more for yourself

Your day-to-day practices and routines often play a huge role in your stress levels. Breaking bad habits and forging good ones can help you feel more at ease during the workday. Here are some good habits to adopt:

Schedule breaks into your day. If you're glued to your chair for the entire workday and never give yourself any time away from work-related tasks, you're much more likely to be stressed out. Paley advised building designated breaks into your daily schedule, and really sticking to them.

"Go for a walk, grab coffee, or take the time to sit down and have lunch," Paley said. "All of these things give you the time to clear your mind, give your brain a

BUSINESS
NEWS DAILY
Small Business Solutions & Inspiration

break from whatever you're working on and reduce stress. Breaks lasting no more than an hour won't cut into your productivity and are especially beneficial if you work in a position where creativity is important."

Paley noted that scheduling these breaks at similar times every day helps you train yourself to be prepared for a "brain reset," making you far more productive over the course of a day.

Devote time to physical, mental and emotional self-maintenance. John Koeberer, author of "Green-Lighting Your Future: How to Manifest the Perfect Life" (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), said a healthy diet and regular exercise, along with a good self-image and spiritual practices, can prepare you to deal with stress successfully.

"Just the knowledge that your mind, body and soul are in sturdy shape is a huge deterrent to stress getting a foothold," Koeberer said.

Be kind to yourself. When you're bogged down with stress-inducing projects and deadlines, it can be difficult to see beyond them. Even long-term assignments end eventually, so you just need to keep going and remember that the challenges you're facing now will seem small and insignificant when you've finally overcome them.

"We can all recollect instances that we thought at the time were real deal-killers, only to have them turn out to be a small anthill," Koeberer said. "Adopt the thought that this, too, shall pass."

It may be impossible to eradicate every stressor from the workplace. You may not even want to do that, as some stress can be healthy and encourage you to meet deadlines and keep your head on straight. But working to eliminate bad stress and making your workplace healthier will change the way you view your job.

How to Plan Your Workday for Productivity

Credit: luminaimages/Shutterstock

The demands of the modern workplace often mean blurring the lines between work and personal time. Whether you're an entrepreneur or a corporate professional, you may find yourself answering emails, taking calls and completing projects long after you've left the office for the day.

While some thrive on this "always-on," workaholic schedule, too much of it can lead to burnout – which means that though you're constantly working, you're not getting much accomplished. If you want to make the most of your working hours (whenever they might be), here are three ways to plan your time and maximize your productivity.

BUSINESS
NEWS DAILY
Small Business Solutions & Inspiration

Have a (flexible) plan for each day

Starting each day off by writing out a "plan of attack" can help you get through your to-dos and stay focused throughout your work hours, said Bradley Anderson, a software engineer at MyRadar.

"Do your best to spend the day working through the list you have made," Anderson said. "If you find yourself being interrupted or sidetracked, make a conscious effort to get back on task as soon as you are able."

However, don't let your plan get so rigid that you're not able to accommodate for changes or unexpected situations that may arise. Kameron Frugoli and Taylor Gallanter, co-founders of mobile barbershop The Hot Towel, said flexibility is the key to their success.

"Knowing how many hours I'm going to work and how many customers I'm going to see in a day are important things to consider in my planning, but I always try to take a step back and make sure that my planning doesn't get too granular," Frugoli told Business News Daily.

"We need to know when to follow the script and when to be ready to act on the fly," added Gallanter. "Whether it's a flat tire, parking ticket, broken window or an electrical malfunction, you have to learn how roll with the punches and not let these things stop you from having a productive day."

Prioritize meeting invitations and decline when you can

Meetings and a full calendar are often hallmarks of a busy employee, but "busy" doesn't necessarily equal "productive." Dennis Collins, senior director of marketing at West's Unified Communications Services, advised declining unnecessary meetings whenever possible to free up your valuable time.

"When it comes to meetings, businesses too often live by the 'everyone's invited' mantra," he said. "Our own research found only 36 percent of all workers actively contribute in all the meetings they attend, indicating a real productivity problem for businesses."

How do you know if you should accept or reject a meeting invitation? Collins said to evaluate if your presence is necessary and determine if you can afford to put other priorities on hold. If you feel a meeting offers a low return on your time

investment, you shouldn't feel compelled to attend, he said.

"Excuse yourself from the meeting and, if appropriate, recommend a co-worker who is better able to contribute to the conversation," Collins added. "Another option is to only attend part of the meeting, and then excuse yourself when the meeting has moved on to tasks outside of your workload. Just be sure to discuss and arrange the timing beforehand with the meeting organizer."

Stop trying to multitask

Many studies have shown that multitasking isn't the productivity boon many people want to believe it is. Stanford University research, for one, found that people who constantly try to multitask "cannot pay attention, recall information, or switch from one job to another as well as those who complete one task at a time."

Another study from the University of California, Irvine that found that once a person is distracted, it takes an average of 25 minutes to return to the original task. Therefore, single-tasking is the way to go if you want to keep your day on track.

"Multitasking may make it feel like you are getting a lot done, but in reality, the time added from context switching is actually slowing you down," Anderson said.

Collins agreed, noting that it's wise to limit distractions by blocking off sections of your calendar for specific projects – which may mean going "offline" and informing your colleagues you'll be less available for a short period.

"It is much better to focus on one project for a few hours and produce quality work than to risk working on multiple projects at once and get lost in the mix," Collins said.

And if you think "working through lunch" is going to help you accomplish more, think again: The disadvantages of multitasking come into play here, too, and you'll only burn yourself out if you don't schedule breaks into your workday.

"(Working through breaks) is common within companies today, especially the startup community," Gallanter said. "I use my breaks as little moments throughout my day to think and relax."

"It's not only good for my body since I'm in a job where I'm on my feet for most of the day, but I find that it also helps clear my head and stay focused," Frugoli

added.

6 Ways to Improve Your Work-Life Balance Today

Credit: Stokkete/Shutterstock

Work is demanding — you're expected to show up for a full day to complete your tasks, and sometimes, the expectation is set to be available 24/7, especially with the ubiquity of smart devices. Though it's commendable to excel at your career, when it bleeds into your personal life it can encroach on your mental and physical well-being.

"In our digitally driven world, it's imperative to maintain a work-life balance," Jackie Stone, CMO of MiMedia, a personal cloud storage company, told Business News Daily. "I've worked in digital media for more than 20 years and as we become more connected, more people have decided that staying 'on' 24/7 is socially acceptable — and it's not."

People need time to think, relax and give themselves a break: Otherwise, productivity will decrease, she added.

You need boundaries to achieve balance between your personal and professional lives. However, the subject doesn't have to be broached as completely black and white. As many experts have pointed out, balance isn't about building an

**BUSINESS
NEWS DAILY**
Small Business Solutions & Inspiration

impenetrable wall between your personal and professional lives, but finding ways to connect and integrate the two.

In their speaking series CEO Real Talk, entrepreneurs and business experts Garnett Newcombe and Kay Woods frequently cover the topic of work-life balance, and acknowledge that it's difficult to navigate the high demands of both career and home responsibilities. Newcombe and Woods told Business News Daily that employees often lack the ability to prioritize and balance their work and family life. Workers also have trouble overcoming the guilt of working long hours and accepting the need for individual personal time.

"I stress work-life balance because I believe other parts of the world have it right when it comes to life first, work second," said Monique Tatum, CEO of Beautiful Planning Marketing & PR.My team is happy to come to work and they are actually much more productive while they are here."

So what can workers do to stop stressing and start getting work-life balance right? Here are six actionable ways to help you adjust your attitude and feel more in control right now.

Recognize the role of work

Work plays a significant part in life. It keeps the lights on, pays the mortgage, makes the car payment, funds retirement and permits yearly vacations, Newcombe said. Adopting the right mind-set allows you to celebrate and enjoy the fruits of your labor, rather than making your job seem like endless drudgery.

Don't be afraid to unplug

We live in a connected world that never sleeps. Turning off from the outside world provides time to recover from weekly stress.

"It also gives us space to let other thoughts and ideas surface. When you are always on, you don't allow other things to surface that might be more important," Stone said. "I meditate each morning for 10 minutes, which provides me with a great start to my day."

Create (and stick to) a daily routine

Like maintaining a calendar, implementing a strong daily routine will help keep you on track to achieve the balance you want. According to Lewis Howes, entrepreneur and author of "The School of Greatness" (Rodale Books, 2015), setting strong habits, such as sleeping 8 hours, avoiding checking your email for the first couple hours of the day, getting outside daily, and taking time to eat right and work out, will make you healthier and happier.

"It will absolutely reflect in your mental clarity, emotional capacity, relationships and creativity," Howes said. "Those are the traits that make up the greatest leaders and most successful people."

Make time for yourself

While being good at your job is important, it shouldn't be your entire life. You were an individual before taking this position and you should prioritize those activities or hobbies that made you happy.

"Whether you take a walk in the park, get a massage or [take] a hot bath, it's important to always set aside an hour a week to do something for yourself," said Mark Feldman, vice president of marketing at Seven Step RPO (Recruitment Process Outsourcing).

"When [we] hire, we ask about [details like] books being read by the applicant. It shows that they have interests outside of work life," Tatum said.

Tatum suggests reading, traveling and fostering hobbies that have nothing to do with your career.

Take your vacation

Sometimes making time for yourself means taking a vacation and shutting work completely off.

"A vacation could be a 15-minute walk around the block without looking at your phone, or a vacation could be two or three weeks traveling with family/friends," Stone said. "It's important to take a step back to physically and mentally recharge. If you are surrounded by good people at work, a vacation should be easy to take."

Be present, consistent and accountable

Being present requires you to be attentive at home, at work and during free time, Woods said. Where you spend your time and energy has a direct connection to how successful you are in achieving work-life balance.

"It's so easy to get caught up working, but it's so important to spend time with family, friends or other people who bring joy into our lives," Stone said. "Though it might not seem obvious at first, the memories that we create while spending time with those we love help spark new ideas, and ways of thinking."

About Us

Whether it's a food truck or a fashion line, a coffee shop or a consulting firm, Business News Daily's goal is to help entrepreneurs build the business of their dreams and to assist anyone working in a small business make smart decisions about products, services and ideas. Our reporting style is simple: We seek insights and advice from experts and then stick to the basics by bringing you concise, actionable information business owners can use to make the daily decisions required to start and grow their businesses.

Mission Statement

To provide the ideas, inspiration and solutions needed to help entrepreneurs and small business decision makers succeed.

To learn more visit our website and follow us on social!

BUSINESS NEWS DAILY
Small Business Solutions & Inspiration