



In This Issue

Work Smart

Did you know that, according to [Gallup research](#), people who are emotionally disconnected from their jobs actually have lower wellbeing than people who are unemployed? MHN understands the connection between work and life, which is why our wellbeing assessment includes a section on your work environment.

Fortunately, you can feel better about your work *and* your life if you learn to work smarter, not harder.

- Ways to Achieve Balance
- Avoiding Negative Self-Talk
- Improving Work Relationships
- Ways to Stop Procrastinating



Ways to Achieve Balance

Life can be a juggling act. Work, family and personal needs compete for your time and attention, but a sense of balance can help you create a rich and varied life. Here are some ways to help you achieve balance:

AT HOME

Spend time with your children.

Strengthen your children's self-esteem and build a positive relationship that will last a lifetime by spending as much time with them as you can.

Make meal times special.

Eat dinner together as a family several times a week. Make the dinner table a place for family members to share news and excitement. Serve healthy meals that everyone enjoys.

Hold family meetings.

Use regular meetings to assign household chores and to discuss goals, problems and family events.

Maintain a calendar of family activities.

Use colorful markers to note all appointments, meetings and special family occasions. Post the calendar where everyone can use it.

Have fun with your family.

Plan fun family activities. Exercise together; go on bike rides, hikes or day trips to relaxing places. Join fundraising walks and fun runs.

AT WORK

Plan, prioritize and organize your work life.

Make long and short range plans for individual projects. Prioritize each day's tasks, listing the most important jobs first. Set a deadline for each task so you can complete the project on time.

Take breaks.

Breaks help you concentrate. Get up and stretch, have a refreshing glass of water or take a short walk, if possible.

Use your lunch hour.

Write a letter, pick up some groceries or make personal phone calls. Schedule a doctor appointment, read a book or think of ways to improve your work-family balance while you rest.

Sharpen your communication skills.

You'll have fewer problems at work - and at home - if you can express yourself clearly and understand others. Talk with your supervisor if you're having any problems at work.

LEISURE TIME

Cultivate personal interests.

Take time for gardening, golf or crafts activities. Sign up for art classes. Join a bowling league. Learn to play the guitar.

Build regular exercise into your routine.

Join a health center or explore other options for regular exercise. Put on the calendar the time you've committed to exercise. Make "exercise dates" with a friend to help build commitment and fun into your workout.

Take mini-vacations.

A day trip to the country or a recreational area can add variety and relaxation to your life at little or no cost.

Get involved in your community.

Coach your child's soccer team. Give a crafts demonstration for the local scouting group. Volunteer for a special project at your place of worship.

Use your Employee Assistance Program.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help you find childcare and refer you to social services, community resources, educational opportunities and seminars that can help you learn how to balance work and family demands.

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Avoiding Negative Self-Talk

Are you surprised at how badly you sometimes treat yourself? We should be our own best friends - our biggest fans. Instead, when we get into a difficult situation, a voice in our head screams:

"I can't do that!"

"I'm not good enough"

"I'm not athletic"

"I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket"

Sometimes it seems like it never stops. But it can.

Negative self-talk is a habit that people develop to protect themselves. They use it to keep themselves from trying things that may be scary or uncomfortable. "I can't do this" may really be a way of saying: "I don't want to deal with failing at this."

We are strongly influenced by our feelings; they often determine what action we ultimately take. If you're feeling uncomfortable, that negative voice kicks in, and you may decide to take no action at all.

But our feelings don't have to control us. We have the ability to choose the emotions we have. If you don't like feeling guilty, frustrated or doubtful, you can choose not to. It's not easy, but in order to become successful at making healthy choices, you must avoid negative self-talk and begin to cultivate the habit of positive thinking.

IDENTIFY KEY SITUATIONS

The first step is to understand and identify those situations that give rise to negative feelings. Does an inner voice say you're an unhealthy eater if you give in to that ice cream craving? Does it scream you're a failure as your colleague ridicules you in front of your boss?

As you begin to understand your reasons for negative self-talk, and the situations in which it occurs, you'll find yourself recognizing it more quickly when it starts. Eventually, with practice, you can replace the negative thoughts with positive ones before they even occur.

As you practice, it's very important to consistently acknowledge the positive changes you make in your life. Did you make healthy food choices this week? Did you speak to the colleague about her behavior? If so, give yourself a mental pat on the back.

STRATEGIES

1. List any counterproductive thoughts that occur to you in a given situation.
2. Develop a list of challenges or counter-beliefs (positive self-talk) that counteract the negative thoughts. These should be realistic, useful, believable and believed. Direct them towards one's thoughts rather than one's feelings or emotions, and make them as powerful or persuasive as possible.
3. Once you have identified counterproductive thoughts and developed challenges to those thoughts, practice substituting the challenges until they are second nature in real life.

Remember, there are bound to be times when you feel frustrated, depressed or inadequate. Positive thinkers know that these feelings are valid, and they don't try to ignore them. Just acknowledge the thoughts, work to understand them, and try not to blame yourself for the conditions that lead to those feelings.

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Improving Work Relationships

How often have you looked forward to your lunch or coffee break, so you could chat with your co-workers about your vacation plans or the movie you saw last weekend? Friendly conversation and work-related activities can help us develop special bonds in the workplace. In fact, many of us can probably think of at least one close friend whom we've met through work.

When a person forms positive relationships with co-workers, that individual typically enjoys his or her job more and is more productive. There are times, however, when establishing and maintaining a positive work relationship can be challenging, to say the least. If you want help improving your work relationships, here are a few tips:

DEVELOP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Avoid negative thoughts and criticisms. Your positive approach can make a difference. Be less judgmental and more accepting of others. You will create a more positive work environment for yourself and your co-workers.

DON'T JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS

Reacting defensively to situations without knowing the whole story can cause misunderstandings. Gather as much information as possible.

IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Listen carefully and focus on the speaker's message. This will allow you to respond appropriately and avoid misunderstandings. When the speaker is finished, state your understanding to ensure there isn't any misinterpretation.

RESOLVE CONFLICTS EARLY

When a negative situation does arise, don't let it fester. Be direct, but courteous. Develop a plan of action to address the problem with your co-worker. Then work together toward resolving it, before bringing it to your supervisor.

SET BOUNDARIES

Developing friendships with co-workers is a natural process. However, it's important to set boundaries to ensure that the friendship doesn't interfere with your work. Focus on your priorities at work and try to limit personal discussions to lunch breaks or after work.

TREAT ALL CO-WORKERS WITH RESPECT

Be respectful by paying attention, listening carefully and responding appropriately. Always be courteous and professional. Regardless of the situation, try not to lash out or be rude. Be open and honest about your feelings and allow others to do the same.

UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT PERSONAL OR CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

When you and a co-worker don't see eye-to-eye, try looking at things from his or her perspective. You'll both be more productive if you recognize the need for cooperation to reach common goals.

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Ways to Stop Procrastinating

People procrastinate for many reasons. Regardless of why you put off important tasks, there are ways to get moving. Here are the reasons for procrastination and ways to avoid them.

PROBLEM: CONFUSION

You're about to tackle a huge, complex task and you don't know where to begin. You spend hours shuffling the pile of papers on your desk, but you can't seem to find a starting point. Days pass, and you get more and more anxious about completing the project on time.

ACTION: MAKE MOLEHILLS FROM MOUNTAINS

At the beginning of an enormous project, break the job into smaller pieces. Set a long-range goal for completing the project and divide the job into manageable sections.

PROBLEM: FEAR OF RISK-TAKING

Your manager asks you to take on new responsibilities in the marketing department. You've never created a marketing plan and you don't know how to develop new clients. While you're flattered by your manager's confidence in you, you're afraid to make mistakes. The marketing file sits on your desk while you decide what to do next.

ACTION: LEARN TO RELISH RISK

There's no way to learn without taking risks. Most successful people face new opportunities knowing they'll make mistakes. But they also know that they'll gain valuable information along the way. Take a close look at your fear of failure. The negative consequences of stagnation are far greater than the dangers of making mistakes.

PROBLEM: LACK OF PRIORITIES

Your in-box is stuffed with memos on five different projects-each one marked "urgent." You dart from task to task, but never seem to accomplish anything. Your motivation starts going down the drain when you miss another deadline.

ACTION: LEARN HOW TO PRIORITIZE

Make a list of all the things that need to be done. Use the ABC method to determine your priorities. Place each item on the list in one of the following categories:

Priority A: Must-Do

Priority B: Should-Do

Priority C: Nice-to-Do

When you're prioritizing your tasks, ask yourself why you're doing this work and how it relates to your goals and objectives. Assess the urgency of the project. Ask yourself if you can delegate some of the work to another staff member.

PROBLEM: PERFECTIONISM PARALYSIS

You have some great ideas for a new project. You start writing an outline but rewrite the proposal a dozen times until you get it "just right." Your high standards are keeping you from completing the project.

ACTION: FOCUS ON COMPLETION

While it's good to have high standards, perfectionism can stop you in your tracks. Assess the importance of your project. Let the purpose of the job determine how much time to spend. Focus on completing the work. If you finish early, you can go back and fine-tune.

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