

Work Life Balance 1: Recognising Imbalance

This resource accompanies the following video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_N-l2wg8u0&list=PLbtnXja2syLcUtsqzdVpxl9JjSC6A5ok0

Obvious Signs of Imbalance

1. Taking time off work with stress
2. Trouble getting to sleep or getting a good night's sleep
3. Feelings of hopelessness and depression
4. Anxiety about going to work, about leaving work at a reasonable time or about leaving or returning home.

If you are experiencing any of these things you may like to think about seeking professional help. That sort of help can buy you a breathing space during which you can re-evaluate your priorities and decide on a course of action. Here are some other obvious signs of imbalance:

5. Feeling bored or under-challenged at work
6. Regularly eating two or more meals at work
7. Not having time to pursue leisure activities
8. Only spending short periods of time with your family and loved ones, or not seeing them at all for periods of time.

Three Weak Signals of Imbalance

1. Feeling something isn't right but not acknowledging it to yourself and those closest to you.

EXERCISE: Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you have enough time to unwind from the day before going to bed?
- Do you have time to cook a hot meal when you get home?
- Do you have good quality conversations with your partner and friends?
- Do you frequently miss your children's bedtime, or spend days away from home?
- What do those closest to you think about this?
- Are they expressing something about it in the way they behave?

Be honest with yourself!

2. Are you living your life through a screen?

Over the next week or so just try to notice how much of your life you are living through a screen. Run some experiments with yourself by leaving your phone behind, or at least leaving it in your pocket or bag.

EXERCISE: Multi-Sensory Snapshot

This is a good way of combining mindfulness with reducing screen time.

Next time you find yourself somewhere pretty or inspiring don't reach for your phone. Try instead to 'soak up' the moment by doing the following:

- Notice the details in what you can see and hear.
- Notice how you feel - the physical sensations on your skin, the temperature, the breeze, the feeling in your muscles
- Notice what you can smell
- Notice the emotions you are experiencing – happy? sad? anxious? angry? surprised?

Take a multi-sensory snap-shot of your whole experience.

3. How well are you connected to your sense of purpose?

EXERCISE: Revisit your purpose

What does the word 'success' conjure up for you?

- Career? Money? Possessions? Personal achievements? Quality of relationships? Experiences? Living by a set of values or beliefs you hold to be true and dear? Number of facebook likes? Something else or some other things?

Take a fresh look at what you are doing it all for:

- What do you feel is your purpose?
- How well you are achieving it?
- Is your purpose mainly about work or mainly about life outside work?
- Is your sense of purpose in balance across your whole life?

EXERCISE: Reflect on your 'PERMA'

Seligman (2002) proposes a model for human fulfilment that covers five distinct areas of life with the acronym PERMA:

Positive emotion – feelings of happiness

Engagement – Flow, or losing yourself in the moment or task

Relationships – of all kinds

Meaning – a sense of purpose and being connected to values you hold true

Accomplishment – achieving things you can be proud of

On a scale of 1-10 where would you place yourself, right at this moment, on each of the five parts of PERMA? Focus in particular on Meaning because:

- If you have a strong sense of purpose you are more likely to seek out the kinds of relationships that help you to feel fulfilled.
- With a strong sense of purpose you are likely to find yourself in flow states more easily.
- You will have a better sense of the things you need to accomplish and be better placed to achieve them.
- All of this will tend to bring you more frequent feelings of happiness or positive emotion.

By putting some energy into making some small changes that make your work and life outside work fit better with your purpose you may find some balance being restored.

A Quick Fix to Restore Balance

A quick fix that works for me is going for a walk in the countryside. It works at a number of levels:

- It conveys the benefits associated with exercise.
- It changes your focus, from the focal length of a computer screen to the horizon – giving you a different perspective.
- It exposes you to and reconnects you with the sights, sounds, smells and feelings of the natural world bringing about changes in the way you feel, both physically and emotionally.
- It stimulates a different pattern of thoughts by removing you from the static environment of the office.
- You may gain benefits from the calm that solitude can bring.
- It may allow you to connect fleetingly with other walkers and enjoy a brief social exchange.
- According to Berman et al (2008) it has a measurable restorative effect on our directed attention abilities ie the sort of demands typically found in many workplaces.

References

Berman, M., Jonides, J. & Kaplan, S (2008). *The Cognitive Benefits of Interacting With Nature*. Psychological Science Volume 9: Issue 12 – 1207-1212.

Marsh, N. (2008). How to make work-life balance work. Ted Talk:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdpIKXLLYYM&t=311s>

Seligman, M. (2002). *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*. Simon and Schuster. New York.

