In my line of work as an executive and business coach, I get the chance to work closely with employees across all levels of the organization. One of the main challenges that most people face is finding the right balance between the different aspects of their lives. The common question that I usually get when I deliver work-life balance workshop for employees or business owners is this “Can it be done?” Many started to feel that the life balance is a myth and they do not see any good examples around them. The work-life balance is becoming an important area of focus of companies who care about the well-being of their employees. At the end of the day, a healthy, happy employee is much more productive than one who is frustrated and constantly in a fire fighting mode.

When You Are Off Balance
The people around you normally notice that you are consumed in work and getting off balance before you even notice. If you are spending most of your time working you have little time to reflect on your life and re-evaluate how you are going. The feedback and sometimes complaints of family members and close friends are warning signs that you should consider. I am talking here about the early signs of an unbalanced life, if you are in advanced stage, most probably you have already started to have bumpy relationships, some minor or major health issues and you are certain that you cannot stay like this forever.

A Balanced Life
Another question that I get a lot and I always give this answer: “It depends.” The authentic balance is a balance that fulfills your values on both short and long terms. The balance that you know that none of the important areas of your life are neglected and you put more time and energy in what fulfills you, not what you are forced to do. Having an authentic balance feels like you have some sort of control over the important areas of your life, not running in a vicious circle. Our values are our drivers and they set our priorities. If one of our core values is not fulfilled we will feel that we are not doing a good job. The tricky part of values is that they are dynamic; the order of importance of each value can change with time and even with situations. Also values have different definitions from one person to another and they have so many ways to be fulfilled.

Let me give you an example, a fresh graduate who just started his/her new job might have important values like achievement, career, mastery and recognition in the beginning of his/her career. Later on, in the same career, maybe the values of developing others and transferring knowledge and experience might become more of a priority than personal mastery or recognition. The value of achievement used to be fulfilled when this employee did a good job, but after changing the priorities of values, it can be fulfilled by seeing the people, he/she helped, doing a good job. My point is that the priorities of values and how each value gets fulfilled is a dynamic process. The same act can fulfill more than one value and makes you feel more fulfilled.

The life-balance is not the goal here, the goal is to be more aware of the priorities to your values and have a plan to fulfill the core values without reaching the area of burnout.

Putting in a Plan
One of the famous coaching tools is the wheel of life, a simple yet very much an eye-opener tool that helps people to take a snapshot of their current situation from a satisfaction point of view. The wheel of life consists of 8 aspects. The first aspect is the spiritual life. This is the area related to nurturing and refueling the soul. It differs from one person to another. It differs based on beliefs and practices. Each person has his/her own definition and way to fulfil this area.

The second aspect is the self-growth. This is where the mind grows and broadens the horizon of mental and intellectual capacity. This can be a book you read, an inspiring person you meet, a conference you attend, an exploration trip, exposure to different cultures and so on.

The third aspect is the health and fitness. It is divided into two main subcategories; mental health and physical health. We use a simple spectrum to assess the level of satisfaction of the mental health. This is not for any medical diagnostic purposes. The spectrum is inner peace and a calm mind on one end, and anxious, irritated mind on the other end. The physical health consists of food you eat, water intake, the quality of your sleep, physical exercise, and activities you do.

The fourth aspect is love and family. One of the easy measures is the face-time you spend with your family and, of course, the scope of presence while you are with them.

The fifth aspect is the social life. Here come real friends, colleagues at work, extended family, and effort to grow your network. The simple measure here is related to important social events that you attend and the quality of relationships you have.

The sixth aspect is career. I know this comes as a shock that career is only one aspect out of eight. That is why I prefer to use the expression “life balance” not “work-life balance.” Here a simple measure is to recall why you are working and if this career is fulfilling this purpose. Career satisfaction can be related to the position you reach, the nature of the work you do, the prestige you get and so on. It is different from one person to another.

The seventh aspect is the finances. Five main subcategories to measure your financial satisfaction are your income, expenses, saving, investments, and debts.

The eighth and final aspect is the leisure or fun aspect. What you do for yourself just for the sake of being happy. It can be a hobby or a reward system.
for yourself. The point here is that you have something related to you only and you do it for your own pleasure.

**The Wheel of Life**

Rate the level of satisfaction in each of the eight aspects of the wheel from 1 being extremely dissatisfied and 10 being extremely satisfied. The visual itself can give you an indication of the aspects that are causing imbalance or where you should put more effort and time.

Here are some questions to ask yourself after filling your wheel of life: What is the one aspect that, if improved, can have the biggest positive impact on my life? What is a priority for me that has been neglected for a long time? How can I improve the score by one point in each aspect? This is where you start to put small goals to get you moving forward.

**Facing Reality without Having Control**

Let us face the reality. We do not always have control over our life and time, but we do have responsibilities, deadlines, overload at work. We cannot simply say: “It’s ME time. I will leave everything and go relax somewhere.” There are two important checkpoints that you should consider if you believe that you cannot control your working conditions or you believe you should control your working condition.

The first step in facing the reality is to check if you have a victim or victor mindset, this can be a game changer:

- **Victim Mindset**
  A victim mindset believes in choice and consequences. A victim is in a certain position because of choice, not because of external factors. The victim knows the difference between the circle of control, where we have the power of change; the circle of influence, where we can facilitate change, while the final outcome is not in our hands; and the circle of concern, where we have no control or significant influence over the outcomes. The victim chooses his/her jobs, with the pros and cons, and accepts the consequences. The victor reminds him/herself when things get tough and they are in this position by choice, not by chance. The powerful question the victims use is: “What’s possible?”

- **Victor Mindset**
  A victim, on the other hand, is a master of blaming and making sure that whatever is happening is the fault of someone else. The victim focuses on the circle of concern and totally forgets about the circle of control and influence. They believe that life is unfair and that they are paying the price by their misery. The victim feels that they deserve better and they are not appreciated enough, maybe without putting any effort, they have a false sense of entitlement. The limiting questions the victims use is: “Who is to blame?”

The second step in facing the reality is to become creative and make sure that you are not using one of the unhelpful thinking patterns. The most common unhelpful thinking pattern in life balance is ‘All or Nothing’ thinking. The ‘All or Nothing’ thinking sometimes seems very appealing and makes sense: “I either have time to go to the gym and workout or I cannot be healthy and fit.” The ‘All or Nothing’ cuts all the middle ground and creative options. It is a form of polarized thinking that leads to diminishing your options and shifting your focus to only one solution – impossible in many cases. If we borrow the powerful ‘what is possible?’ question from the victor mindset, we can start to create new solutions and instead of “my way or the highway,” we can use ‘all roads lead to Rome’ thinking.

**Useful Tips to Achieve a Life Balance:**

1. Remind yourself of the reasons you choose to be in this job to avoid falling into the trap of a victim mindset.
2. Ask yourself how I can improve each aspect of my life, even if I do not have the time or energy. Ask yourself about the middle ground solutions.
3. Explore your priorities and have the courage to admit them. Sometimes your priorities will be different from the social norms. If you are not aware of your priorities, you will always feel that there is something missing although you might be living your authentic balance.
4. The aspects of life are interrelated. Some people feel they are improving the quality of their relationships when they take care of their health, others see healthy family connections helps them in the spiritual aspect. Make these connections and give deeper meanings to that acts you do.
5. Eliminate the time wasters, have a general overlook on where you put your time and energy. Being at work does not mean that you are working. Check how many hours are wasted and how you can make the best of the commuting time.
6. Ask yourself what will matter most in five years, and what will be destroyed if I keep living like this. Your gains and pains can give you a good boost to manage your balance.
7. Audit your relationships and make sure you have good quality time with those who matter. This can be irreversible, if neglected. Eliminate the energy suckers out of your life.
8. Stop comparing yourself with others. Your balance is different from everyone else. Focus on yourself and compare yourself against your current values and potential.
9. Learn to say ‘NO’ to distractions. Do not be part of the agenda of everyone and lose yourself in the middle.
10. You should be your own priority. If you are drained, you are no good for anyone else. Make sure to take the time you need to recharge your energy before start focusing on others.

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