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Focus On Work-Life Integration

Work is a central activity for most of our adult years. Contrast the 13,000 in-school hours it took us to move from kindergarten through high school with the 63,000 hours the average sixty-year old will have spent at work. During those early stages of development, the knowledge and experiences necessary for our success were commonly defined and provided for most of us. In fact, even if we weren't interested in the curriculum our educational system prescribed, attendance was required. For many of us, school was our work. Our post-secondary education provided another requisite formula for credentialing and success. Most of us were not aware of the amount of resources and nurturing our communities and families invested in planning for and supporting our early success and security.

As our dependence on family and community diminished, we transitioned to a work life that offered similarities to the supported, prescribed lifestyle of childhood. We accepted our employer-defined work tasks and goals in exchange for salary, benefits, pensions, training, and job security. Job security is no longer realistic. Today's employer needs an employee that is self-directed, able to stay current, and to manage his or her own personal and professional development. This increased level of responsibility, and investment of time and resources, is driving a growing number of adults to seek a higher level of satisfaction and meaning to their work.

If this sounds familiar, a good question to ask yourself is how much time you spend in the care of your career? Not surprisingly, the better we care for ourselves, the greater satisfaction we enjoy. Comparing the care of your work life to the care of your physical self shows some surprising similarities. These comparisons tap helpful and familiar recommendations that have demonstrated success. What can you add to the list below?

Care of Self

- You're the only one who can do it.
- Eat the right food.
- Be prepared. Plan your meals. Exercise.
- Steady, sustained attention.
- Ask for support.

Care of Career

- Take the initiative; no one will do it for you.
- Determine what is best for you.



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- Evaluate what you're currently learning.
- Track trends.
- Create a plan.
- Keep your mental muscles challenged.
- Lifelong learning.
- Mentor or learning community.

Research shows that although the body is remarkably resilient and will benefit from care at any age, the younger you commit to good habits, the more benefits you will enjoy. The same is true for your work life. Although introducing positive habits at any age is helpful, the sooner you take a proactive role in managing your career, the more benefits you will enjoy.

You may be asking yourself how you can achieve better work-life balance. The short answer is: *change your focus!* Here's how. According to Dr. Adam Perlman, director of Integrative Health and Well Being at Mayo Clinic, "Work-life balance is not necessarily what we should focus on, but [work-life integration](#) is. Part of the argument is that balance implies this sort of 50-50 (balance), and even prior to this moment, most of us weren't typically working 50% of the time, not being with our family, and then spending the other 50% focused on our home lives."

Dr. Perlman offers these useful tips for integrating work and home life:

- **Create routines and follow them.**

Effective work-life integration calls for creating routines that work and — *most importantly* — maintaining them. Find the right mix of routines that integrate your work, home, and personal life.

- **The 3 Ds: Delegate. Delete. Do.**

In addition to creating and following routines, Dr. Perlman recommends a "delegate, delete, and do" strategy to achieve good work-life integration. When you find yourself feeling a bit overwhelmed:

- pause;
- take inventory of your competing tasks at that moment (whether work-related: or not);
- prioritize your "to dos";



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- and figure out which ones you have to **do**, those you can **delegate**, or which ones you can **delete** (at least for now).

Dr. Perlman explains “Sometimes when we look at that list, simply keeping things on the list can build anxiety for us, and sometimes we can say, *‘All right, let’s just take that off the list so we don’t have to think about it now. I can always bring it back later.’*”