



## Three ways leaders can navigate imbalanced lives

BY SUE HAWKES

You're probably familiar with the idea of a *work-life balance* since it is a running theme in this hectic world, but it's also an elusive goal. The phrase is plastered everywhere as people aspire to achieve ideal harmony between their family life and their professional career. However, the demands of both make it difficult to pull off, especially for anyone in a leadership position. And maybe there's a good reason for that.

Simply put, a perfect work-life balance is not possible for those in leadership positions, nor should it be the goal. Instead, it's more useful to strive for *work-life integration*, where you not only bring your work home, but also bring your home to work.

### Embracing an Imbalanced Schedule

In debunking the idea of balance, here are three tips for leaders to help them accept and maximize an imbalanced schedule:

- **Stop and breathe**

Balance is an illusion in our external lives, but it can be created internally as a mechanism that gives busy people the ability to cope better with challenges. This emotional equilibrium is a

measured thought choice that gives us more control of our responses to situations.

When I catch myself reacting, I stop and ask, "What am I telling myself? Is it true or head trash?" This helps me unravel what's factual and what is a knee-jerk emotional response based in fear. I stop and breathe until I find my internal balance again.

- **Learn to say no**

Many people have difficulty saying no, and those who do say no are often consumed by guilt. But saying yes before fully analyzing the commitment can lead to being over-committed and overwhelmed, so it's a matter of prioritizing what you say yes and no to.

Every time you say yes to something, you're also saying yes to much more. Instead, tell them you'll consider, but first sit down with a pad and pencil and list all those additional things you're taking on by saying yes. Finding a healthy, achievable balance is a matter of saying yes and no to what fulfills you and your life without overcommitting.

- **Don't be afraid to follow**

When we're over-committed and feeling imbalanced, we have to take a hard look at what's ahead and stop

doing things that aren't working. A leader empowers others by giving them space to lead or take a larger role, thus lightening the leader's load. You can't always make things happen, and you can't do it all. At times, you have to let go and let others take the lead.

### A Healthier Alternative

There will never be a 50-50 balance. But you are still able to fit in all of the things that are important to you by slowing down, choosing what to say yes and no to and accepting help. With work-life integration, you will step towards a healthier balance in life. 🌱



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