



THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK/LIFE BALANCE

By Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar, M.D.

I would like to address an American myth that *to be productive at work requires a sacrifice of one's family life and health*. The belief in corporate America is that health and productivity are mutually exclusive. Many CEO's of financially successful companies live by this credo. Their employees are also expected to live by this credo in favor of increased productivity and profit margin. This belief has become a part of the business culture. People feel that sacrificing their health for productivity and profit is a worthy cause. They are conditioned to continue behaving in this way with pay raises and bonuses. The bottom line result of this belief is an increase in stress and a decrease in efficiency. Illness is a direct result of this belief and resulting behavior. Increased health care costs due to doctor/hospital visits and sick days result. This erodes the monetary bottom line and quality of life of the employees and creates a stressful work environment. The myth of increased productivity at the cost of health leads to reduced productivity in the long run.

In the 30 years that I have been in medicine, I have worked with thousands of business owners and executives to facilitate balance in their lives without compromising their health or productivity. They are afraid they will have to sacrifice profit for needed balance. As I have worked with them, I have witnessed the opposite of the pervading unhealthy belief – creating a healthy business culture improves productivity and the quality of life of all reflected by a greater profit margin, lower overhead and happier employees.

What I believe is that there is another erroneous myth operating in our culture: that making healthy choices and exercising takes more time. What I have observed is that the time taken to exercise and eat right increases ones efficiency at work, saving time in the long run. It enables one to work smarter, not harder. It also reduces stress and increases resilience, empowering the immune system and decreasing the number of sick days needed.

Federal Express performed a study where they found that every dollar they spent on promoting wellness saved them six in overhead costs. The return on this investment is significant in dollars alone. There have been numerous studies with similar results over the years that have demonstrated and validated the wisdom of a healthy lifestyle. But cultural beliefs are hard to change. We need to become more aware of the impact of our beliefs and choices to live better and healthier lives. Profit at the cost of health does not even make sense. We need to rethink our definitions of success and materialism and place a priority on our health. We need to repattern our working culture around healthy work/health strategies and normalize work/life balance in the workplace.

I have listed some practical tips to follow to begin creating work/life balance:

1. Do 20 minutes of aerobic exercise before or after work.
2. Pack a healthy lunch the night before with plenty of greens and a protein.
3. Eat healthy snacks like nuts and fruit between meals.
4. Avoid fast food, alcohol and vending machine food.
5. Organize your workday in order to complete the most important tasks/projects first.
6. Remember to take deep breaths every few hours.
7. Try to get fresh air during the day.
8. Don't sit for longer than 40 minutes at a time; find opportunities to stand-up and walk around throughout the day.

9. Drink at least six glasses of water daily.
10. Try to focus on being creative and open to learning every day.
11. Be kind to your colleagues.
12. Focus on increasing your sense of purpose and meaning every day.
13. Apply healthy boundaries towards unhealthy dynamics at work.

In order for us to stay healthy and productive, a shift in perspective towards work/life balance can have a significant effect on decreasing our stress and increasing our sense of meaning. In my experience, it is vital to the reclamation of health..

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