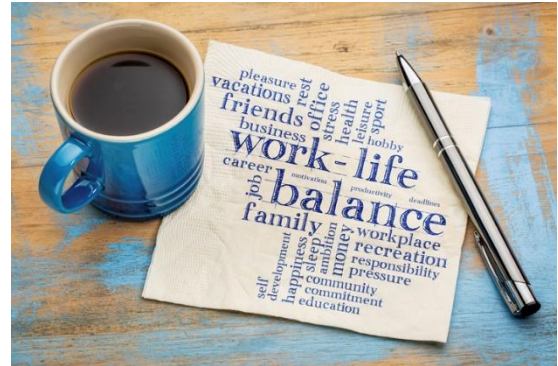


How to Find Work-Life Balance that Works for You

By Lisa Herbert, MD, FAAFP, CPEC

Work-life balance is one of those phrases that often gets negative responses like; it's not attainable, forget about it, balance doesn't exist or it's a myth. It also gets renamed to terms like work-life blend, work-life integration, work-life harmony. If we are talking about having our work and personal life coexist, it doesn't really matter what we call it. What matters is what the term means to you.



I think we can all agree that the term work-life balance does not literally mean trying to equally distribute your time between work and your personal life. Years ago, the term was used to make sure workers were getting a needed day off; where they were able to rest and not have to think about work. Fast forward to the digital age and now we have continual access to work. We can now be 'on' 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The whole idea is to get off the hamster wheel and stop thinking about how you can achieve balance and instead think of it as a necessary step to develop a life you want and need. You must be intentional about developing habits and applying principles that help you to find your balance. When you are living a balanced life, you are living a whole life, where all the parts function well together.

Healthy Mind, Body and Spirit

Work-life balance is not about having an equal amount of time between work and your personal life. It's about not having work consume your life. It's about being able to work and maintain a healthy mind, body and spirit. If you're physically healthy you have the stamina and drive to function at a high level. If you are emotionally healthy you are more resilient and can manage your stress better. If you are spiritually filled, no matter what the challenges are, you are at peace and your purpose and passion are fueled by your desire to make a difference.

Why do we talk about work-life balance so much?

One reason, according to an article by Tait Shanafelt¹, is that work-life integration is one of the key drivers of physician burnout. Physicians were found to be twice as likely as the general population to be dissatisfied with work-life integration. This is thought to be in part due to the long work hours and the inability of a full-time physician to find time to integrate their personal and professional lives.

This is even more difficult for female physicians and providers who also deal with the societal demands of taking most of the responsibility for child rearing and household responsibilities. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center showed that 60% of mothers working full time say it is very to somewhat difficult to balance the responsibilities of their job and their family. While an answer may be to reduce the work hours, this is not always wanted or feasible.

So, for physicians and providers to achieve work-life balance, what must they do?

Work-life balance is individual and must be defined by the person who is seeking it. First you must define what it means to you and then determine what that looks like. So, ask yourself:

- What does work-life balance look like to me?

- What is important for me to have in my life to be able to have balance?
- Does my current work life situation support the lifestyle I want to have?

5 R's for Finding Optimal Work-Life Balance

1. Reassess

Find some quiet time to check in with yourself. Use this time to relax and reflect on where you are in the various aspects of your life. Are you happy with your current work-life integration? What can you do to improve your relationships? What will you have to change or let go of to achieve balance?

2. Recharge

Boost your work life fulfillment and find time to focus on what really matters. Regain your energy and strength by carving out more time for laughter and play, daily deep breathing exercises, 10-15 minutes for stretching, meditation, getting outside and going for a walk, staying hydrated, enjoying a good book or movie.

3. Renew

Vow to make changes to your current work life state, to have the lifestyle you desire. Just like we renew acquaintances with old friends or take up an activity again after taking a hiatus, we can also renew our commitment to achieve work-life balance. Achieving this balance will mean creating boundaries, learning how and when to say no and teaching people how to treat you.

4. Reconnect

Take time to reconnect with loved ones. We can sometimes let our busy schedules get in the way of connecting with our loved ones daily. One way to reconnect is to slow down and really take time to listen, resist the urge to respond, and make eye contact. Take time to unplug and put down the devices.

5. Reclaim

Get back time in your day by making simple changes. Plan your day by doing things like taking out your clothes that you are going to wear the night before. Wake up 10 minutes earlier each day to look at your schedule and prepare for your day. This gives you an overview of how to prepare for the week. Try to look at your work schedule a week in advance. Ask for help. Having a peer coach can help you develop the practices you need to have better balance. Hiring people to help with household and outside duties can also free up time so you can spend more time doing the things you love and being with the people who mean the most to you ([WorkLife Concierge](#) can help with that!).

Work-life balance is not one size fits all. You are responsible for how you want your own work-life balance defined.

We Can Help

Talking with a [Peer Coach](#) from VITAL WorkLife can help you assess your work-life balance, find what works for you and set boundaries. Learn more about your peer coaching benefit on the VITAL WorkLife App and contact us at **877.731.3949** to access your resources today.

Lisa Herbert, MD, is an Executive Leadership Coach and Peer Coach at VITAL WorkLife. Learn more about Dr. Herbert on her website, [Just The Right Balance](#), and purchase her book, [Take Back Your Life: A Working Mom's Guide to Work-Life Balance](#).

Sources:

¹ Shanafelt, TD. Mayo Clinic Proceedings. *Executive Leadership and Physician Well-Being; Nine Organizational Strategies to Promote Engagement and Reduce Burnout*. January 2017.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27871627>