

Life on a Balance Beam

By Lisa Schilling RN

Are you investing your time in activity that will pay life-long dividends or are you spending your time on short term gains? I am often asked how I am able to do the variety of things that I do. For me it has been the determination to work on the things I feel passionately about.

I also value contrast, so I schedule free days in my calendar. These are days where my family and I can do what we want, when we want. Days where nothing “has to” be done. People comment that it seems impossible to do. Not really, if you want them bad enough.

You make your schedule, you sign your kids up for multiple activities and you take on outside responsibilities. If down-time is really important to you, then you will be dedicated to finding and planning for it. If it is not, you will keep committing to things that will keep you and your family running from daylight to dark every day.

How do you achieve balance in life? Is it even possible? Often it requires changing and modifying the way you think and how you use your time. By reorganizing your time in little ways, you can create a life that gives you more quality and satisfaction. Knowing what you want and who you are is important. Lining up your choices with what you say is important to you, is a good place to start.

What is important to you and what do you value? Is this reflected in how you spend your time or money? Look at your calendar and your bank statement to find out. It can be a sobering realization that much of your time is spent doing things that, down the road, won't make any difference in your life. That is a problem. The bulk of your time should be spent on creating a life that is fulfilling and true to your values and goals.

Choices and trade-offs are based on your personal values and deeply held beliefs. Often stress and unhappiness can develop when you believe and value one thing and yet, you constantly find yourself doing another. In order to create balance, your values and activities need to line up. Begin to organize your life around you, rather than organizing yourself around the demands placed on you.

Achieving balance takes self-discipline and persistence. Consider keeping a daily calendar. By visually graphing your time, you

can see what is keeping you in constant motion. No time for you? Then you need to “prune” the activities that no longer “bear fruit” or reward you from your schedule.

If the activity does not line up with your “What Matters Most” list or you no longer get benefit from it, look for ways it can be gracefully removed. As your schedule is opened up, you can begin to schedule personal time, activities that recharge your batteries and more time just relaxing with family and friends.

Relaxation time and hobbies can help people become happier and more personally fulfilled. Freeing up time, by dumping unproductive time-sappers will help you regain control of your life. You may then see the “fruit” of your better choices. Begin by doing what you can do—now. The roots you spread will affect your ability to grow.

Most people do not plan time for themselves. They take what is left over and personal time is often squeezed out. Begin to balance your calendar and evaluate what you are spending your time on. Many people find they are “over-budget” and are “spending” in the wrong areas.

The starting point to alleviate this “time over-draft” is to stop and think. Most people are so busy rushing here and there that they don't take time to think about why they are doing what they are doing or about what affect this constant activity will have on their health and their family. People too often engage in frantic activity, instead of thoughtful analysis. They get so busy that they lose sight of what really matters.

The key is learning to use your time better. You cannot get more hours out of each day, but you can better utilize each of those hours. To properly balance the demands on your time, you must be more intentional. Become a better planner and choose what you spend your time on more selectively. Then you simply need to actually do what you plan.

I don't believe that you can ever “have it all,” at least not at the same time. We all make choices on how and what we spend our time on. Be sure that you are making the right choices at the right times and give yourself fully to each task at hand. By lining up your choices, planning ahead and prioritizing, you will feel more peace and contentment with how you balance the time you are given.