

10 Tips for a Work Life Balance



1. Step away from email and social media

We need to learn how to control our use of technology. Checking email first thing in the morning uses up valuable brain energy and zaps your brain neurons. We have a reward system in our brains called dopamine – every time you pick up your Smartphone and check emails and social media you are tapping into this reward system so your brain is very happy. However you are creating a crazy loop which is then very hard to get out of: the more you check the more you want to.

Creating balance in our lives has to start with putting boundaries on these energy eaters. Your perception of your workload will immediately diminish and you will become calmer as a result. Plus you'll be far more productive. So designate specific times for emails and social media and instead of checking your phone in the morning use that time to focus on your intentions for the day and what you want to achieve.

2. Just say 'no' when you need to

I want to add a little 'yes' here before you say 'no' and by that I mean acceptance of any anxiety or stress you may feel when you're asked to do something or take something on.

Allow a little reflection time – perhaps by saying 'That sounds like a great idea/project. I need to think about how I can fit this in. Can I get back to you by...?' Even a small variation of this will work if you are talking to your boss. Remember you can say anything you like – it's all about how you say it. Buying a little reflection time allows you to discuss other ways of helping or completing what needs to be done in a way that is more compatible for you.

And remember that when you do say 'yes' it is a choice – no one is forcing you to do so!

3. Get enough SLEEP!

Getting sufficient sleep is one of the best things you can do. Don't wear the badge of 'busy' or 'I only need 4 hours a night'. Research shows that the majority of us need 7–8 hours of proper, deep sleep, to allow our brains to fire up again on all cylinders.

Many avoidable things are down to poor sleep, from accidents to ill-thought out decisions to elevated stress levels. Sleep is something within your control, so make sure that your evening rituals include winding down (no screens 2 hours before sleep), not drinking too much alcohol, and that where you sleep is well ventilated and a peaceful relaxing place.

4. Leave work at work

Even if you take work home with you, you need a cut-off time when you switch off from work – it can be as simple as taking some deep breaths or clearing your desk and having a quiet cup of tea.

Make sure you have time for yourself and for your own interests – when was the last time you enjoyed a book or film or simply cooking a lovely dinner without an eye on your emails?

5. Practise mindfulness – every day!

Mindfulness is on the increase for a reason. It isn't just a trend. It is something you can tap into any time and it gives you the power of focus and reflection,

decreases your anxiety and stress levels and teaches you to be in the moment. Even five minutes a day has been shown to bring benefits.

Mindfulness can be sitting somewhere quiet and focusing only on your breath but it can also be practised just be being in the moment with whatever you are doing, whether that's gardening, sitting on a bus or train, playing with your children or having dinner with loved ones. Be there.

6. Ease off the adrenalin

Whether at work or at home we tend to rush from one thing to another, always needing to be doing something. But this rushing makes you produce more adrenalin, meaning you are putting yourself on a permanent high alert status which contributes to stress.

Plan for downtime when you are not necessarily always doing. This is especially important for children who need to be allowed to get 'bored'.

7. Set your own rules

Work-life balance is always going to be about doing what works best for you. Yes, you may sometimes have to work on a weekend or need to check emails in the evening. You may have periods when you know you will be busier than normal. The point is for you to have control over your choices and to create strategies that work for you.

Working late? Ensure you have a nutritious meal and sufficient sleep and treat yourself to an outing or something special as a reward. On a deadline? Plan to include some mindfulness and up your productivity by working in blocks of time.

8. Be present

Show up in your own life – you only have one and its right now.

The most important thing you can be doing at any given moment is what is right in front of you. So that means that if you are sitting in your garden, sit in your garden; if you're preparing a paper, be in that moment; if you're preparing that paper for a presentation next week the most important thing is your preparation; if you're talking to your friends, talk to your friends – don't allow your mind to wander – be present and listen with your whole self instead – you'll be amazed at the impact of this.

The present is where the magic happens.

9. Take a step back

Get some perspective on things. Most things are not nearly as important as we think they are!

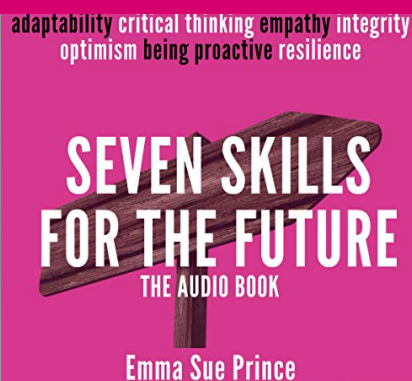
We tend to catastrophise events which only creates more stress. So listen to your language: missing a train is not a disaster and working on a project it not a nightmare.

Unfortunately when we use language like this our brain believes us and responds accordingly by creating more adrenalin to respond to the disaster or nightmare!

10. Schedule regular breaks

Make time for things you enjoy. When you feel under pressure the last thing you'll want to do is take regular breaks but if you want to be productive, effective and calm is the only way. We tend to work best in 90-minute spurts (without distractions) followed by a 15-minute break. Try it for a day and see what happens!

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