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Tools that Shatter the Illusion of Work-Life Balance and Build Fulfillment

By Sue Hawkes

work-life balance & career transitions

We hear about it every day, all the time. We hear about it everywhere from parenting blogs to social media to workshops at leadership conferences. The chase for work-life balance is everywhere, and it's a myth. For busy leaders with demanding careers, work-life balance is just not possible. While that may sound negative, I view that as a positive because it stops me from striving for something that is not achievable. I can stop feeling guilty and dissatisfied and instead start focusing on the internal balance that is most crucial, and happily, possible for everyone. Delegating, aligning your calendar to your values, and learning to say no all allow you to shatter the illusion of work-life balance and lead you to a life by your design.

Delegate and Elevate™

Many of us are leaders both at work and home; the demands never stop, and we can feel pulled in all directions by the never-ending list of chores, deadlines, and tasks. The key to finding more balance and less stress is to delegate the tasks you don't like and aren't good at and use your time only for the things you like and are good at or love and are great at. I use a practice called Delegate and Elevate™, developed by Gino Wickman, to categorize my tasks both at work and home.

Try categorizing all of your tasks into these four quadrants: Love/Are Great At, Like/Are Good At, Don't Like/Happen to Be Good At, and Don't Like/Not Good At. Once you have a clear visual of where your tasks fall, focus on delegating all of the things you don't like or love doing. Use the worksheet at the end of this document to get started.

It may be difficult to delegate at first, but you'll often find that the tasks you don't like are what someone else enjoys. One of my employees loves to research and create spreadsheets. These are some of the last things I would ever want to do, but when I ask her to do them, she is excited. Finding what you can swap with your co-workers will bring you all closer to feeling more fulfillment and less stress. Don't be afraid to outsource tasks, as well. Be intentional about spending time on things that further your values and priorities.

Align Your Calendar to Your Values

In order to achieve work-life integration, we need consistency in living our values. When we're misaligned with our values, life doesn't work, we're out of sync, and we feel uncomfortable. One way to keep your priorities aligned with your values is through the practice of calendaring. Calendaring means asking yourself what matters most and if the way you spend your time reflects your priorities.

The YESS! Calendaring Exercise below will help you put your concentration into the areas of your life that are most important to you.

1. List the three to five areas in your life that are critical to your happiness.
They might include family, health, career, spirituality, community, relationships, learning, and recreation, but they can be anything, as long as they are priorities for you.
2. Next, take a blank set of calendar pages and jot down your vision of an ideally balanced life. Imagine it. Don't edit, just set up a life you'd wake up to every day, excited to live.
3. Now, print out your actual calendar for the same number of months you used for your "ideal" calendar in step two and compare the calendars. How does what you actually do on a day-to-day basis compare with your "ideal" calendar? Where are the biggest gaps? Is what you say is important to you reflected in your calendar?
4. Write down the first step you need to take to realize a life that is more integrated and reflective of your "ideal" calendar.
5. Begin immediately; especially if you find your ideal and reality are worlds apart.

Learn to Say No

Learning to say no to things can be difficult, especially if the request is made by someone we care about or it's something that can benefit us professionally. Being overcommitted, however, leads to feeling overwhelmed and a lack of balance. Every time you say yes to something, you're also saying yes to much, much more. How often do you stop to consider all that your first yes leads to in terms of time, work, and commitment?

Try this: When someone asks you to take on a new responsibility or job, don't be too quick to say yes. Instead, tell them you'll consider it and when you'll get back to them. Then, take the time to sit down with a pad and pencil, truly evaluate the task, and write down the additional tasks your one yes will cause. If you look at your list and realize that all of those yesses add up to more than you're willing to commit to, you can say no with a clear conscience and without hesitating. If you're determined to find balance in your life between what you must do, versus what others would like you to do, this is a powerful place to start.

The word balance is bantered about in self-help books and health magazines all the time, as if it's a destination we are all seeking. Yet I haven't met anyone who lives there. It's an illusion. The trick is defining what balance means for you. Finding work-life integration more consistently means delegating, intentionally choosing what to say yes and no to, and aligning your calendar so your time reflects your values. Simple? Yes. Easy? No.

About Sue Hawkes

Sue Hawkes started her first business at age 10 and was immediately bitten by the entrepreneurial bug. She's moved on from her childhood days of selling macrame plant hangers to helping business owners be intentionally great in their businesses, as leaders, and in their lives. She is CEO of YESS!, a best-selling author, keynote speaker, Expert EOS Implementer®, Certified Business Coach, WPO Chapter Chair and globally recognized seminar leader. Sue is a frequent contributor to Forbes, Fast Company, Inc., and Entrepreneur and has been recognized by the Regional U.S. Small Business Administration's Women in Business Champion of the Year award, Women Who Lead from Minnesota Business Magazine, NAWBO Minnesota's Achieve! Vision Award and named a 2018 Enterprising Woman of the Year. Her most recent book is "Chasing Perfection - Shatter the Illusion; Minimize Self-Doubt & Maximize Success."

DELEGATE AND ELEVATE™ WORKSHEET

LIKE/GREAT

LIKE/GOOD

DON'T LIKE/GOOD

DON'T LIKE/NOT GOOD



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