

More "not so secret" secrets to work-life balance

February 7, 2017

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Let's face it: usually when we discuss work-life balance, we're talking about working in more time for self-care and family/personal time. People who choose to become psychologists tend towards the Type A, perfectionistic, even "workaholic" personality. You know who I'm talking about-- all of you straight A, Dean's List, perfect GRE folks! So typically psychologists need more help in taking time for their personal life (see previous January blog). Please note that I don't want to minimize the importance of self-care as a psychologist: I remember a successful physician leader mentioning in a talk about work-life balance getting up at 4 AM to exercise every day—not my idea of balance!

However, part of balance starts in your workplace—and balance doesn't necessarily mean forgoing leadership opportunities. It does, however, mean that you can't do it all without expecting to get burned out. Psychology is an emotionally taxing profession and often under-recognized. Here are a few lessons learned about excelling at your career without sacrificing your balance.

1. **Choose wisely, my friend.** When choosing professional experiences, my goal is to maximize the outcomes. Am I passionate about the topic? Does it further more than one professional goal (leadership, public outreach?) Will it provide me with a growth experience or networking beyond my typical reach? Can I use it in more than one way? For example, recently a book chapter led to a conference presentation, an article, and a national networking event that was helpful to a promotion opportunity—it's all about bang for the buck!
2. **Have a "no" buddy.** This is a tip I got from the APA Leadership Institute for Women in Psychology (LIWP). Before taking on a major role/activity that you have ambivalence about, run it by a non-partisan professional peer who is your "no" buddy. If they say no, take it off your plate.
3. **Have a "yes" person too.** I find that many women turn down leadership opportunities with the idea that it will not work well with their family responsibilities. This might be a valid choice, but it shouldn't be always the automatic choice. Carefully reviewing the possibilities with a trusted mentor can be important to avoid missing out on leadership opportunities unnecessarily. Sometimes it's less that the leadership role will interfere with balance and more of lack of confidence or self-efficacy.
4. **Think ahead.** When accepting meetings or events, I've learned that it's not healthy for me to accept more than one evening event per work week. I start to resent the time away from my family and my typical routine, including exercise which I typically do in the evening. Similarly, having more than one travel event in the same month can be stressful on me and my family. If possible, space out travel and evening/weekend work commitments
5. **Limit the home connection to work.** Our job as psychologists requires us to be in the moment with our patients, students, and teams. I can't manage home efficiently from work. Having a check in time during the day with your childcare can often work better than being on speed dial/text message.
6. **Organization, organization, organization!** Developing an efficient routine where my paperwork is complete by the end of the day, electronic templates that speed my charting time, minimizing wasted time, and finding ways to increase my efficiency (group visits, etc.) helps me to get a lot done quickly at work and then be able to enjoy my time away from work.
7. Don't underestimate the **importance of presence at meetings.** Early in my career with young children, early morning and late evening meetings were difficult if not impossible. However, I missed out on opportunities that my presence may have made there. Even if you don't think the meetings are relevant to you, you don't know when a research or leadership opportunity may be on the table. If you're not at the table, you're unlikely to be given an opportunity. Consider surveying the meetings to identify where the most impact and power lies. Maybe you can't attend every week, but maybe you can attend once per month.
8. Consider a **network of psychologist friends.** These are the people you run things by, get ideas from, and who provide support when you're feeling overwhelmed. They can help put things in perspective in a way that others in your life might not be able to. These could be people you work with or those you know through APAPO, SPTAs or other psychological associations.

9. Consider **other networking opportunities relevant to your workplace or identities**. As a woman, networking with other women has been particularly important to me. We are lucky enough to have a Women's Professional Staff Association at the Cleveland Clinic that provides networking, mentoring, socializing, and leadership development opportunities with other physicians and psychologists in my workplace. Additionally, there are groups for early career professionals, diverse identities, etc. These can be important for support and advice in addition to professional growth.
10. **Have several mentors**. I have found I need different mentors for different places in my career. Consider a mentor for work life balance.
11. **Incorporate self-care into work**. Make sure you take your breaks and your lunch. I take a 15 minute walk at least once per day to refresh (short breaks for physical activity are proven to increase productivity!)
12. **Model self-care for your staff and patients**. Consider walking meetings with staff, encourage other staff to take their breaks, and model good limits with work hours. Engaging patients in relaxation training is an added bonus in my current position. Additionally, I can show them my step counter or food diary app and how I use it.
13. **Have a positive attitude**. If you feel like you are always missing out on something at home or overworked, your resentment will show at work. I start each week with a new quote that will inspire me and hopefully my colleagues and patients. I post it on my emails and in my office where it reminds me and keeps me focused.
14. **Be matter of fact**. As a female professional with young children, I don't emphasize the fact I have children and caregiving duties. When I worked part time, I didn't make that a major factor when discussing scheduling. I still however, would set limits. "I have another event at that time" or "I have another commitment" generally worked fine. It's sad to say, but there is still a particularly high amount of sexism toward working mothers. I've found that generally keeping it more neutral and matter of fact works best. If pushed, I do share "I do not have available childcare at that time" when asked to attend 6:30 AM meetings!
15. **Minimize work "drama."** Psychologists are great at listening to other's problems, and sometimes their role in the workplace becomes the recipient of others' emotional baggage and workplace infighting. This is an emotional drain to those in a position already taking in a lot of emotion. It can also suck your time and put you in awkward positions with other coworkers. Mentally and physically setting some limits will help you be more efficient as well as less stressed at work.
16. **Consider the emotional impact of your work**, and have appropriate outlets for potential vicarious trauma. Whether you work with trauma, patients with life threatening illnesses, or those with severe mental illness, you need an outlet for coping with your own reactions. Peer support, personal psychotherapy, and other resources can help to keep you ready to be there effectively for your clients.

Useful links

Self Care Resources: www.apaservices.org/practice/ce/self-care/index

APA Leadership Institute for Women in Psychology: www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/leadership/index

APAPO Resources for Early Career Psychologists: www.apaservices.org/practice/ce/tools/index