Title:
Three Strategies for Putting Balance Back into Your Work-Life

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Summary:
Has the pendulum swung too far in increasing productivity at the expense of employee work-life balance? This article offers strategies for putting balance back into your work and life.

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Article Body:

Has the pendulum swung too far in increasing productivity at the expense of employee work-life balance? In an article titled, "Americans of All Stripes Are Sicker Than They Need to Be", Paul Krugman indicated that full-time American workers work, on average, about 46 weeks per year compared with 41 weeks for full-time British, French and German workers. One indication that this is taking a toll on American workers is that it appears that more employees are taking mental health days. According to a May 8th article in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, more than one-third of U.S. workers say they played hooky from work over the past 12 months. Were you one of them?

One HR executive with an S&P 500 company that I spoke with said, "The gains in productivity of the past few years have been on the backs of our employees who are maxed out. As for myself, during the week I go to work and come home. If I'm lucky I have time to eat dinner, work out, shower and go to bed. I don't know where we're going to get the next round of productivity."

Need further proof? According to syndicated columnist and best-selling business author, Chuck Martin, less than 15 percent of more than 2,000 senior executives and managers thought that their lives were in balance. When asked why, many pointed to technology which has made it easier to stay connected to work.

To make matters worse, in a recent study by Randstad USA, 38% of employed U.S. adults indicated that they do not usually take lunch, 33% work overtime without additional compensation, and 31% say they work on Sundays.

What does all of this mean to you? In effect, you are now on call 24/7 including weekends, holidays, and vacations.

If moving abroad to work in Britain, France or Germany is not an option for you, then read on for some tips on how to stop this work-life balance madness.

1. Establish and communicate boundaries for where, when and how you will work. Put it in writing, share it with your boss and staff, and more importantly, adhere to it. Make sure it is something you feel comfortable with. For example, one executive I know works from 7:30 a.m. - 6 p.m. She is available via cell phone during her commute (7:00 - 7:30 a.m. and 6:00 - 6:30 p.m.) She checks email remotely once during the evening after going home and her kids are in bed. Saturday is her family day and she doesn't do any work. She checks emails again on Sunday evening and takes time to plan and prepare for her work week while watching Grey's Anatomy. The key: figure out what will work for you!

2. Control technology rather than let it control you. Blackberry, PDAs, cell phones, laptops, and remote access are tools to help you be successful, not control you. Most executives that I speak to reluctantly admit that no one has mandated that they be linked to the office 24 hours a day. Stop being a super-hero and limit your use/ abuse of technology. Try turning off your Blackberry or cell phone after leaving work or at least when you get home. Stop text messaging and checking emails during meetings - not only is it rude, but if you can't be fully present, then perhaps you don't belong in the meeting after all.

3. Use technology to help you execute your business goals. Block time for projects, planning, and strategic activities or your day will be filled with the urgent and not the important. Block time on your calendar for coffee, lunch and other types of networking meetings as it is important to "see and be seen." Schedule specific times (preferably only two times per day) when you will review/ respond to email so that you aren't constantly interrupting your work flow every time a new email arrives. Use the task list and reminder features in your email or database management tool to schedule tasks to be completed on specific days. If you find that you are frequently interrupted during time you scheduled to work on projects, planning, and strategic activities, forward your phone to voicemail or even better, book a conference room or go some other place where you can work without interruption.

In a commencement address delivered to 2,700 Oklahoma State University Graduates, President George W. Bush gave this advice, "Harness the promise of technology without becoming slaves to technology." Now that's good advice.