

Living life in balance

Strategies to create a more fulfilling life

The phrase “work/life balance” is a misnomer. Attempting to achieve equal balance is unrealistic. However, striving to live a fulfilling life is possible with targeted focus and relentless effort.

Fulfillment means different things to different people so defining what’s most important to you is the first step toward assuming control.

Work/life balance was the topic at a W.I.S.E. (Women In Science and Engineering) breakfast meeting I recently attended sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Continuing Education. The women who attended represented the full spectrum of life stages – college student, single mom, career mom, married with no children, married with children, and caregiver to elderly parent. All of these women were juggling work/life demands that varied from day-to-day and from person-to-person.

In short order, we all realized that to live a more satisfying life requires making tough choices. One woman admitted that she took back control when she learned how to say “no.” As a working single mom, she was saying “yes” to too many commitments, which proved to be self-defeating. She became over-extended, over-burdened and emotionally over-whelmed. Exhausted, she drove to work reflecting on her priorities and realized that only three were really important to her: #1 to be a GREAT mom; #2 to add GREAT value to her company; and #3 to spend Saturday mornings, at least two per month, reading great novels. In short order, she mastered the art of saying “no” and wakes up each morning feeling more in control of her life.

Do you feel that you are living with purpose? Do you feel that you are achieving what’s more important to you? Do

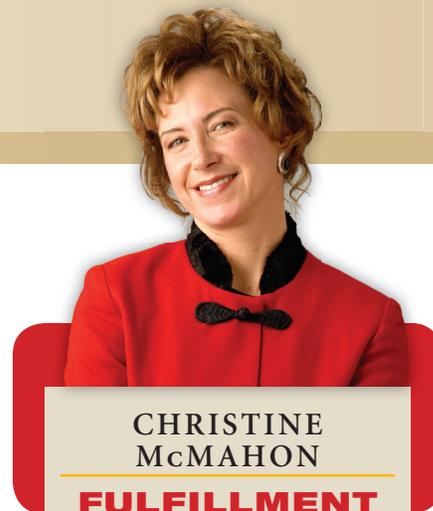
you feel fulfilled in some areas of your life, but not others? Do you feel burdened by your responsibilities and disappointed with yourself? If so, here are a few ideas to help you take back control of your life:

1. Set well-defined priorities. Define what’s most important to you and how you want to live your life. Write down these goals and review them daily. Be ruthless with your time. Treat your time like currency. Invest it, don’t spend it.

Earlier this year I encountered a sales professional whose goal it was to save \$25,000 by the end of 2011. To achieve this goal he needed to significantly reduce his spending, which meant not drinking with his buddies over the weekend. It was difficult at first because his friends “dished out a lot of heat” but by the end of the first month, he was comfortable ordering water or a soda, letting their jabs roll off his back. It’s now Q4 and he’s in the home stretch with only \$5,000 left to hit his number! Who’s laughing now?

2. Forget perfection. Embrace success. Make a steadfast commitment to achieve your goals. Save perfection for those situations where there is a substantial payoff for the extra time, effort and energy that is required to achieve that goal. Define your success criterion and then go for it. Watch the magic that unfolds when you live on purpose.

3. Seek to be self-full. Akin to the flight attendant telling you to put your oxygen mask on first before assisting others, taking time to recharge is each person’s individual prerogative



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and responsibility. For many, pushing harder has become the norm. But without built-in recovery time, self-sustainability becomes questionable. Unless your own tank is full, how can you possibly offer your best support, guidance or direction to others? This is not about being selfish but about being self-full. You can’t give to others what you don’t possess. Take time to refill your engine.

4. Create a “To Accomplish” list.

Ditch your “To Do” list (which is what you often inherit from others) and create a “To Accomplish” list (those activities that give your life meaning and advances your personal plan). When you live with purpose, your energy output becomes life giving. At the end of each day and then again each week, ask yourself: What measurable progress have I made since yesterday? Since last week? Even if you can only measure small wins, continual progress over time builds momentum and leads to positive outcomes.

Success begins with taking the first step. Ask yourself: “How would the quality of my life improve if 20 percent of the stuff that steals my energy was replaced with 20 percent of the stuff that gives me energy?” Then ask yourself, “What one simple doable step can I take to take back control and live with purpose?” ■

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