

# Work-Life Balance It Isn't About Balance

By David Irvine, Best-Selling Author and Leader's Navigator

**W**hen I was working on a balancing pose in my yoga practice, the harder I tried to balance myself, the more I lost my balance. Maybe it was an effect of the airplane flight the day before, but for whatever reason, it just wasn't working for me and the harder I tried the worse it got and the more frustrated I became. As my teacher watched me struggle, he gently came up beside me and reminded me, "Don't try to be balanced. Relax. Stop judging. Stop 'trying.' Find your breath. Sometimes you'll find the balance; sometimes you won't. Keep practicing."

We talk about work-life "balance" these days as if it is something to be "achieved" like running a marathon, making a sale or accomplishing a goal. Then when we fall short of our expectations we are critical of ourselves for a lack of "balance" in our life. Balance in life, like balance in a yoga posture, isn't really about "balance" at all. You can't "achieve" balance, because balance is not a destination. It's a method of travel. Work-life "balance" is, instead, about being centered and living fully.

If you'd like a little more "balance" in your life, here are three simple strategies to keep in mind:

1. Clarify your values. The antidote to exhaustion is not rest. The antidote to exhaustion is alignment and wholeheartedness. In my intensive Authentic Leadership workshops, I have participants reflect upon their future and what matters most to them. I ask them to think about their relationships, health, contributions to others, expression of their talents, and the time they set aside for inner growth. This is an excellent exercise for you, too. From your reflections, list the top five values in your life. Then rate your life in each area on a scale from 1-10. Be honest. This is your list, not anyone else's. At the beginning of each week, make sure that you schedule time in your day-planner to attend to each of these values. Balance is about living in alignment with your values. Feeling out of balance indicates that energy is being drained from you by living your life according to someone else's conditions. Carve out time on a weekly basis for your soul's desires. A key for living fully is to say "no" to the wrong opportunities.

2. Develop a positive relationship with the present moment. Being rushed, impatient, frustrated, or stressed are indicators that you are not present. You are either speeding forward or thinking about the past, without concentrating on being here now. Living fully is about fully living in the present. Next time you are stressed with a project, impatiently waiting in line, or frustrated with a co-worker, heed the guidance of my yoga teacher and take a few deep breaths to connect with yourself. Look around and see how you can be present with the world around you. Notice the beauty of a flower or plant nearby. Smile at the person ahead of you in the check-out line. Take time to really listen without judging to the person you are frustrated with. It's quite amazing how "balanced" you can feel in the midst of perceived pressure if you remember to stop and be here now. The best present you can give anyone is to be fully present in the present.
3. Stop trying to get more "balance" in your life, and enjoy your day. As I was feeling stressed earlier today with all that was in front of me, I stopped and took some of my own advice. Stress isn't in the tasks or demands. Stress is in my head. Being stressed is a choice. And I'm not going to wait for tomorrow to enjoy myself. If I can't enjoy myself today it's not going to get any better when I'm on holidays. I can enjoy each task and stay relaxed in midst of the tasks. There is no stress except what I chose to be stressed about. There is only work to be done. I just took a short walk with my wife, and enjoyed the time we had together. What needs to get done will get done – eventually. None of us know how many days we have left. Life happens. Enjoy it.

© 2011 by David Irvine. Permission to reprint and circulate is granted.

David Irvine is sought after internationally as a speaker, author, and mentor. His work has contributed to the building of accountable, vital, and engaged organizations across North America. David is the best selling author of five books. These are available in bookstores or can be ordered at [www.davidirvine.com](http://www.davidirvine.com)

For information on how David can bring value to your organization, contact [david@davidirvine.com](mailto:david@davidirvine.com) or call 1-866-621-7008 (toll free).