

"Walking The Tightrope" Exercise

A Business Plan is an essential component of any commercial enterprise, so why not compile a Business Plan for your Life? Stephen Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People" recommends that we "Begin with the end in mind." So if you know where you want to finish up, you can determine an accurate, relevant Work / Life Balance. The following exercises may help you manage your Time-Purse more effectively.

Stage 1: Categorisation

The idea is to create a "Wish List" of the things or situations that you feel would give you a "Perfect Life." OK, I can already hear your internal Doubting Thomas saying, "This is a waste of time"; "What's the point"; "There's no such thing as Santa Claus" and so on. That is a normal, intellectual response, with the emphasis on intellectual.

But the object of this exercise is to circumvent your intellect, and gain more access to your creativity. Einstein said that you cannot solve a problem with the same mind that created it.

This practice of Brainstorming is now well established in many other areas of life, and a part of the process is to be open to ideas that arise, no matter how stupid or impossible they may seem. So all you're being asked to do in this exercise is to suspend your intellect. Give it some time off, you can pick it up again later.

The example below may help you get started. I have listed 6 categories into which each of your future wants will fall. These are generally common to most people, but feel free to create your own.

- Immediate Relationships
- Material / Financial
- Personal Care / Health & Fitness
- Career / Work / Business
- Home Environment
- Friends / Community

In our example I have created a list which deals with the first 3 categories only.

Immediate Relationships	Material / Financial	Personal Care / Health / Fitness

Treat each category separately, and be as wide and far ranging as you can. You might think about a previous ambition or an old hobby that you used to enjoy. Nothing is off-limits, be as adventurous as possible and don't pause to challenge it. Whether it is a

"Must Have", or a "Would Like To Have", write it down, even if it seems like a pipe dream. Once you get through all the obvious pedestrian stuff, you may be surprised to see what follows.

Immediate Relationships	Material / Financial	Personal Care / Health / Fitness
Get on better with my wife	New car	Lose weight
Get on better with mother-in-law	Bigger house	Stop smoking

Remember that there are no limits. You are free to put down anything you like, the longer the list is the better. No one is going to tell you that you've done it wrong, or that you shouldn't want this or that. This is for your eyes only.

Nor do you have to restrict yourself to convention. If you have always had a hankering to play the bagpipes at the top of the Eiffel Tower, who has the right to tell you that you can't. (You may find a local Gendarme waiting for you when you get down, but this isn't the time to worry about that.)

Finally, leave lots of space between each entry.

Stage 2: Prioritisation

Now tear off each wish, fold or crumple it, and put it into a container such as a box or a hat. (As you do for raffle tickets.)

Shake them up and select any two.

Decide which of the two is more important to you.

Discard the less preferable one and place the 'winner' into another container.

When this first round is complete, do the same with the 'winners', and continue with further rounds until you are left with a WINNER for each category.

NB. When you are making your decisions, try not to be influenced by your existing notion of what is realistic. As mentioned earlier, your intellect and current mindset may try to torpedo any potential changes to the status quo. At this point we are only concerned with WHAT you would like; the HOW comes later.

So you now have the seeds for some goals. Sure, some of them may seem far-fetched, and perhaps unattainable, but hey, maybe that is just your current perception.

Stage 3: Calculate current time expenditure

There are 168 hours in a week. The example below is provided as a general guide only, please enter your own estimates.

Activity	Time allocated	Remaining
		168
Sleep	56 (8 per night)	112
Work / Business	40 (8 hr day, 5 days / week)	72
Travel	10 (1 hr each way, 5 days / week)	62
Personal grooming (Showers etc)	5 (approx 40 mins / day)	57
Eating	7 (3 x 20 minute meals / day)	50
Exercise	2 (4 x 1/2 hr sessions)	48

That has taken care of the basics, now what about the other "HAVE TO's" that place demands on your time?

Activity	Time allocated	Remaining
<i>"Have To" No 1</i>		
<i>"Have To" No 2</i>		
<i>"Have To" No 3</i>		
<i>"Have To" No 4</i>		

Time remaining at your disposal _____

Stage 4: Stocktaking

It seems reasonable to suggest that a healthy Work / Life Balance is achieved by spending your time on the things that matter most to you. Keeping that in mind, take a closer look at how much time you have available after your Stage 3 calculation.

Now, how much of that time do you spend on the results from Stages 1 & 2?

What about the time spent on your "Have To's"?

Dare I suggest that there is no such thing as a Have-To? And before you start jumping up and down telling me that I don't know enough about your situation to make that comment, let me add some explanation.

I suggest that Have To's are really only past choices which have been repeated until they have become habits.

And what makes them insidious is that they assume an importance all of their own.

We succumb to them automatically because we don't challenge them. But what is even more important to recognise is that the reasons for doing many of them may be based on History; commitments agreed to some time ago.

So if you are serious about achieving a better Work / Life Balance, why not take each Have To and examine it in the "Here And Now".

Ask yourself "What if I didn't?" (fulfil the Have To).

Follow this up with a "So What"; then try a "And then what?" You may find that the more you challenge the less demand each will have on you and your time.

And while I know the decisions you make are no doubt of enormous importance, please remember that, whatever difficulties you may face today, at around 6.30 tomorrow morning, a big orange ball will appear in the in the East of the sky - whatever you decide.