



Chatsworth Consulting Group

Ten Steps to Finding More Balance in Your Life

Balance – that’s a word that’s thrown about often and easily. It’s something many people claim to want, yet find difficult or nearly impossible to “achieve.” And perhaps part of the problem lies in using the word “achieve.” Balance is not an end-state; it is a state of being, and like all “beingness” in the universe, it is one that flows and moves.

Finding balance means setting up your life to be in line with your desires and values. In order to find more balance in your life, it is important to know and define what balance means for you. It is self-defined. And while most likely it will be in constant flux, there is a basic, underlying balance that will work for you in your life. Your path is to find, define, embrace, and allow it. These 10 steps that I use with my coaching clients will help you along your path.

Step #1 – Know What Matters to You Most

It is important to know what your priorities are. Not what you think they are; not what you think they should be; not what you think others would like them to be for you. What is important to you – in fact, what matters to you is most important. Step #1 is taking the time to sit down and list what matters to you – and in what order.

List the different areas of your life. Consider your family, friends, spouse, children, work, hobbies, community activities, spirituality, personal time, recreation, home, etc. – all the things that make up your life. Once you have this complete list, rank how important each of these areas is to you. Consider each, and then on a scale of 1-10, rank how important it is – how much you value it in your life. You will then know what matters to you most.

It’s also possible to prioritize the different areas against each other – otherwise you may end up with everything being a “10.” Start by seeing if you can list each aspect of your life in order from most to least important. If you get stuck, simply consider each aspect of your life against the ones of the same ranking – if you had to choose, which would honestly come first, your work or your spouse; your spouse or your hobbies; your personal time or your children; etc. If you get stuck, it can be helpful to talk this through with a supportive, objective person – such as a good friend or a coach.



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Once you've got this priority list, try this interesting exercise is to see how much you are actually structuring your life based upon your priorities. Again on a scale of 1-10, rank how much time and effort you allot to each area of your life, or try the priority ranking method. Then see if these numbers match up with your priority ranking for the different aspects of your life. If you're like most people, they won't match. This simply means that you have room for more balance in your life.

Step #2 – Identify What You Can Do Without

If you've identified how your actual life does not match up with your "ideal" priority ranking, you've given yourself a guideline for how to find the balance you desire. Step #2 is to simplify your life so that you have more time for the things that matter most.

Look carefully at your life – go through your day, your home, your relationships, your job, and your life and identify the things you can do without. What are you doing that doesn't need to be done? What's sapping your energy? Where are you driven to reach a goal that isn't in line with what matters to you most?

Identify what you can do without and what isn't working for you. This is a major step towards freeing yourself up to focus on the things that do matter and towards finding the balance that inspires and fulfills you. You don't have to do anything about the things that aren't working for you at this point – simply being aware of them and calling them out can cause rapid changes. As they say, "Awareness is the first step."

Step #3 – Eliminate the Tolerations in Your Life

Tolerations are those things that we put up with, accept, take on, and are dragged down by. They may be people's behavior, difficult situations, unmet needs, crossed boundaries, things you haven't completed, unresolved issues, frustrations, problems and even your own behaviors. These are the energy zappers – the things that wear you out. Step #3 is identifying tolerations and letting them go.

So, once again, get out your pen and paper and make a list. List those things that you are tolerating, and then decide to do without them. It's that simple. It doesn't mean that you walk out the door, run into your spouse (or child, partner, best friend, boss or colleague) and blurt out "I've been tolerating such and such from you and I won't any more – so you need to change!" It means that you become clear with yourself about what you've been tolerating, and you become ready to promise yourself that you will change your behavior in this area. You always have choices – to do something else, to stop your self-defeating behavior, to disengage from a conversation, to leave the room, etc.

You may want to start with things that are easy and simple to eliminate. Or, you may want to start with the one that will be the most inspiring and motivating for you. Either way, begin to cross items off your list when you've really worked them out of your life. Beginning this action speaks wonders for your commitment to finding balance.

Step #4 – Define Your Clutter

Similar to identifying and eliminating tolerations, you need to define and eliminate (or at least reduce) the clutter in your life. It may be physical stuff, emotional baggage, spiritual misgivings, mental images – whatever. The clutter takes up space in your mind, heart, home, and life. Step #4 is to begin to make space for what you want by getting rid of what you don't.

Think of it this way – picture yourself walking into a messy room with piles and piles of extra things. There's garbage on the floor, unopened packages piled about, papers strewn everywhere. It's simply a mess. How do you feel? Is this room conducive to calmness and serenity? Is it beckoning, welcoming, and serene? Or, does it make you feel stressed? Do you feel either the need to hunker down and frantically clean or to simply run away and lock the door behind you? Clutter creates chaos.

Clutter also keeps you from focusing on what really matters. Perhaps you're running around dealing with your clutter, answering phone calls and emails that don't really matter, unable to handle important papers because your desk is covered with piles, saying yes to others because you think you "should." And all the while, you really wish you had time to relax and read a novel, play with your children or make it to the gym. At work you may be constantly interrupted and never finding time to start the big project that really matters to you. It's time to name your clutter so that you can begin to let it go.

"But I can't," you say. "I might need this some day." "One day I'll wish I still had this." "What if there's an article in this magazine that I'm going to wish I had read." "If I say no to him, he'll never trust me again." All of these excuses pop into our heads – and the truth is just the opposite. Trust the universe...if there is something that you're supposed to know, do, or have, the universe will make certain that it comes your way.

Don't worry; at this point you may not be up to reducing or eliminating all your clutter. Simply noticing, acknowledging, and naming it starts you on the way to greater balance.

Step #5 – Be Where You Are

The funny thing about balance is that we somehow tend to think it's over "there" somewhere. When I just get "there," my mind tells me, all will be well and I'll be in balance. Reality is that balance is "here" – wherever you are is your place of balance. This step encourages us to live in the present.

A friend once offered me an amazing thought that keeps me from wandering too far. "Life is not a dress rehearsal," she said. It's not like we practice now to get it right for later. My "job" is to be here and enjoy it now – to truly be where I am and get the most out of it (and give the most to it) that I can. It can be very difficult to truly be where we are. Our minds race ahead (or behind) to think of the bazillion things that we need to do (or didn't do "right"). We jump from what happened yesterday to what will happen tomorrow (or in 5 minutes), what will so-and-so think of this, etc. Zen masters spend lifetimes training their minds to really be exactly where their bodies are. There's so much to see when we focus on being present. I was telling someone recently that there are more birds around this year, or perhaps I'm more present to notice them. There are birds and butterflies and beautiful scenes to be noticed. There are comforts of home to truly be

enjoyed (instead of thinking “oh, I should be doing such and such right now, not relaxing with a good book on the couch”). There are people to be with, to learn from, and share joy with. So much of this is missed when our minds leave our bodies and go somewhere else. As a wise person once said, “Today is a gift. That’s why it’s called the present.”

Before you go wandering “out there” to find your balance, or to find someone to tell you how to achieve your balance, look inside. And look down at your feet and ground yourself in the moment.

Step #6 – Start Pleasing Yourself

A great question to ask yourself as you search for balance is “Whom am I trying to please?” We are taught at a young age to do our best to please others. It may start with learning to do what Mommy and Daddy want so they’ll be happy and you’ll be “safe,” or being given a cookie if we “perform correctly,” or strongly getting the message in school that some things are “right” and some are “wrong.” It doesn’t really matter where our messages came from – many of us walk around trying to please everyone else. In Step #6 we shift the focus from pleasing others to pleasing ourselves.

The person you forget when you put others first is the most important person in your life – you. This is the one person you have to live with forever. And this may be the one person you forget to be nice to. Would you ever treat a good friend the way you often treat yourself? It’s similar to the idea that you are responsible for your own joy. If we try to make everyone else happy so that they’ll love us and give us what we need, we set ourselves up for failure. Not only might we not make them happy, but also even if we do, there is no guarantee that they’ll turn around and give us what we need. How much easier it is if we give ourselves what we need. When we’re happy, we can then give more to others. So find the things that please you, that make you happy. Treat yourself well – schedule a massage, partner with a coach, get to the gym and exercise, or take a nap. Whatever it is that works for you – extreme self-care is a major component to finding balance in your life. And learning to please yourself is one of the first steps in extreme self-care.

This isn’t always easy. Right now I’m mothering two little children. My youngest is only 3 months old, and it is very easy to simply write myself out of the equation when I divvy up my time. I have my children (they “definitely” come before me), my husband (he surely needs attention and love), my family (they may have crises at the time), my friends (wouldn’t want them to think I’ve fallen off the face of the earth), my clients (want them to still love and need me when I get back in the swing of things), etc. And suddenly, there is no Lisa left to go around.

When I take time – even if it’s only 5 minutes – to give myself what I need (and when I remember to ask for what I need and to ask for help – more about that later), I have enough to give to others as well. I’m happy; I realize I’m whole; and I’m in balance.

Step #7 – Go For the Joy

Somehow I learned growing up that given a choice, I should always choose the harder, tougher, more challenging option. This would prove how strong, good, and amazing I was. What a relief to learn that I could choose the easier option – and walk down the street smiling. Step #7 encourages us to go for the joy.

In every moment, we have a choice. We have a choice whether we will go for joy or stay miserable. As Abraham Lincoln once said, “We are as happy as we make up our own minds to be.” And honestly, I think I’ve decided that I enjoy being happy.

Try this: make your face into a very unhappy, angry, disgruntled, disappointed frown. How does that feel? OK, now put a huge, happy, joyful, wonderful, full of wonder smile on your face. How does that feel? When we smile, we actually tell our brains that we’re happy (not the other way around) and our whole body and being responds accordingly.

I’m not saying that life doesn’t have its hard times. Painful things seem to be a part of this world. But as the saying goes, “Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional.” I have seen friends rise above the direst of circumstances simply because they have chosen to focus on what is good and joyful in their lives. Even if all you can find that is good at the moment is a flower, then delight in the flower for simply a few seconds, and see if some of your suffering (or anger, resentment, jealousy, guilt, etc.) begins to dissipate – if only for a moment. You can’t find balance if the thoughts and feelings inside are keeping you down.

Going for the joy means remembering (as best you can) that ultimately you have a choice about where you put your focus. And if you put your focus on something that brings you joy, you’re liable to have and feel more joy in your life. If you put your focus on something that brings you sadness or pain, you’re liable to have more of those in your life. Going for the joy not only increases the balance in your life, it also increases how much you notice as your life changes.

Step #8 – Ask for What You Want

Back to the beginning: you need to be really clear about what you want. You need to know it, live it, breathe it, expect it, and ask for it. That’s step #8.

Ask for what you want from people who can potentially give it to you. Ask for what you want from the universe. It doesn’t really matter exactly how it comes your way, just that it does. Ask for the desire that gets at what would really bring your heart joy.

Ask. Ask. Ask. Ask however and whoever feels comfortable to you. Ask in ways that may stretch you and feel a bit uncomfortable for you. Practice with your coach – take the risk and ask your coach for what you really want. Ask your coach to hold you accountable for taking these steps.

I need childcare for my kids in a few months, and I’ve decided to simply ask for it. I’m mentioning it to practically everyone I know and like. And then I’m trusting that the universe will surprise me with an amazing answer.

That's the second part of asking for what you want. Trusting that you will get it (or if not it exactly, then something that actually works better). Balance is based on the deep belief that life will work out for you in wonderful ways. This is a belief that you can cultivate, and it is a belief that will reward you. Asking for what you want is a start to cultivating it, because when you ask, and it is delivered (often without any effort on your part – which is even more amazing) you truly start to believe that life can and does work out.

Step #9 – You Can Have It All

OK, so this is a controversial step. Having it all has become so tied with doing it all – and that you really can't do. Having it all has also become so materialistic – and that doesn't always have the best connotations. The reality is that once you set your mind to the fact that you can be in balance and can have what you want, you are halfway there. That's step #9.

Remember, you can't do it all. Having it all actually comes after you live your life based upon that notion. When you stop trying to do everything – when you make a commitment to yourself to not do the things that aren't in your best interest or aren't worth your time and effort – you give yourself room to enjoy where you are and what you have. And you realize that you already have all that you need. And isn't that balance?

Step #10 – The Rest is Up to You

When I go through these steps as questions with my coaching clients, the last question is “When do you want to start?” It is up to you when to take the plunge and begin to apply these steps to your life. As soon as you begin, and you open your eyes to possibilities, you will see miracles. You will begin to feel the balance you have always wanted. Perhaps you will realize that you had more balance than you thought you did. Perhaps you will begin to define balance in a way that encompasses the realities and constraints of your life as it is now. Sometimes that makes the constraints less constraining! Perhaps you will allow yourself more joy, pleasure, fun, and presence in your life. And perhaps you will realize that you would benefit from greater support as you apply these steps, and you give yourself the gift of partnering with a coach on your journey. All of these life-altering changes allow, enhance, embrace, and celebrate balance.

And remember, balance is a state of flux. It changes, ebbs and flows. That's what makes it so much fun. Think of tightrope walkers on the high wire. At every moment they are balancing – perhaps swaying back and forth and leaning from one side to the other. They are not walking a straight, steady line. Balance is not a static thing. Allow balance to live and breathe and enjoy the dance of life. And embrace your balance.

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