



Living a Life in Balance

Do you feel like your life is too complicated? Are you often torn between your work and home responsibilities?

“If so, you’re not alone, and you don’t have to despair,” says Odette Pollar, President of Smart Ways to Work, a personal productivity firm in Oakland, California, and author of *Take Back Your Life*. “You can gain peace and relief by making a conscious effort to reduce the complexities in your life and achieve balance.”

Given all that you have to do, it’s easy to lose sight of what’s probably your ultimate goal: to enjoy your life as you follow through on your personal and professional responsibilities in satisfying ways.

Here are Pollar’s suggestions for successfully balancing your time and life.

Learn to Streamline

Speeding up and trying to force more and more into the same blocks of time isn’t the best way to have more time in your life. According to Pollar, the best way to “get it all done” is to have fewer things to do by consciously streamlining your ongoing responsibilities.

Being selective about your choices and how you spend your time is important. And it’s vital to keep your perspective and establish realistic expectations for yourself.

“Regaining balance starts with the awareness that something is out of kilter, that you have too much going on,” she says. “From there you can identify what you want less of in your life.”

Ask Yourself Questions

You can achieve balance by setting your priorities and creating a life around them. This is a long-term process and requires thought and insight.

Start by taking some time to list three to five answers to each of these questions:

- What physical needs are important to you and why?
- What emotional needs are important to you and why?
- What mental needs must be filled to make you content?
- What causes the sense of frustration or depression you may feel?

- What does success — both personal and professional — mean to you?

Your answers will provide information you can use to make changes in your life.

Determine What You Want

Before making any big changes, consider the results you want to achieve. This will give you a starting point from which to choose a direction and set goals.

For example, you might want to:

- Enjoy work and have enough energy left at the end of the day to enjoy your home life
- Cultivate a better relationship with your children, partner, friends and extended family
- Do more things you’d like to do and feel more content

By reacquainting yourself with your needs, desires and feelings, you can plan with a systematic approach for achieving your goals.

Respect the Process

Achieving balance is an ongoing process that requires your regular attention. As you move forward, talk with others about how they have achieved balance in their lives and share your successes.

As you continue on your road to a more satisfying life, remember the following:

- **Keep your job and your life in perspective.** Success at the expense of relaxation and enjoyment is not success.
- **Take yourself less seriously.** Learn to see and appreciate the lighter side of life.
- **Learn to say “no.”** Be firm without apology or guilt.

“It’s easier to balance a simpler life,” says Pollar. “For a life worth living, eliminate the unimportant, whether it be relationships, tasks, responsibilities, possessions or beliefs.”





Spirituality – Finding the Strength Within

“Are you healthy?” When most of us hear this question, we consider our physical health. Are our doctors concerned about our present weight? Is our blood pressure in line with what it should be? Do we exercise and eat right?

We pay attention to our physical health because there are specific, recognizable results. We feel the effects of cigarette smoking. Our waistlines can reflect a high calorie diet.

But what about our spiritual health? Doctors are now pointing to real medical benefits that come from achieving and maintaining a healthy spiritual life. No longer is our physical well-being the sole barometer that defines our overall health; the satisfaction we derive from our spiritual life also plays a part.

It is useful to look at our spiritual health needs and explore ways to improve this aspect of our lives — who we are and how we live our lives. Our spiritual health is much harder to measure than our physical health. A blood test won't tell us how we're doing, and spiritual health can be even harder to quantify because spirituality can mean something totally different to everyone.

What is Spirituality?

“Spirituality is an awareness of the divine or sacred core that underlies everyday life,” says Sandra Hassink, M.D., a pediatrician at the Alfred I. DuPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, Delaware. *KidsHealth.org*, a website sponsored by The Nemours Foundation, further references Hassink's definition: “It is an ongoing search for meaning, and this may involve an appreciation for creation and the natural world as well as traditional spiritual paths.”

Spirituality takes many forms. Some people fulfill their spiritual needs through religious prayer and ritual, and the benefits of such practices are becoming more apparent and more appreciated. According to research published by *Kids Health*, “Patients undergoing open-heart surgery who received strength and comfort from their religion were three times more likely to survive than those who had no religious ties.”

Additional research suggests that “people who attend religious services, or who feel they are spiritual, experience lower levels of depression and anxiety; display signs of better health, such as lower blood pressure and fewer strokes; and say they generally feel healthier,” notes John Cutter, *WebMD Medical News*.

Are There Other Ways to Express Spirituality?

Participation in organized religion is only one way of tapping into one's spirituality. Millions of people are revising their definition of spirituality and finding ways to get in touch with themselves through journal writing, art, volunteer work or quiet reflection. Yoga and meditation are growing in popularity and are now recognized as scientifically-endorsed means of quieting the mind and eliciting calm. Physicians recommend the “alternative” therapies of yoga and meditation for such varying conditions as cancer, diabetes, arthritis, asthma and migraines.

For the athletic at heart, a morning walk in the woods or an evening jog along a quiet path can be a great way to get in touch with one's spirituality. Activities that take place in nature allow the mind to become still, and it is in this state that spirituality is most likely to evolve.

Now What?

Think about new ways to explore your own spirituality. Find a spiritual outlet that feels right — whether it is through a faith institution, yoga or meditation, art, exercise or another means. The physical and mental health benefits of tapping into spirituality are enormous. Growing your spiritual life may do more than increase your inner awareness. It may help you grow overall on your path to better health.

