

LIVING A BALANCED LIFE?

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Attaining balance is a hopeless dream...it will never happen...why strive for it? Is this really true? Is living in balance as a disciple of Jesus, a leader, a biblical concept? Is the current leadership “rat race,” that most leaders I know find themselves in, a capitulation to our fast-paced culture or should it be embraced as normal and acceptable? I believe the answer is found in making a distinction between two types of balance:

BALANCE IN YOUR JOB

In his book, “The Next Generation Leader” Andy Stanley makes the following observation. “Being a balanced or well-rounded leader looks good on paper and sounds compelling coming from behind a lectern, but, in reality, it is an unworthy endeavor.” When I first read this it greatly disturbed and upset me. I mumbled under my breath that I couldn’t disagree more. For years I have encouraged leaders to have better balance and, in the face of “it’s impossible,” I still teach it. I was just about ready to write Andy a letter when I read on and understood what he was *really* saying. Then I strongly agreed. He was speaking of balance in the sense of feeling the need to be equally competent in all aspects of being a leader—to give equal time and expect equal results in all your leadership responsibilities.

You *should* be out of balance in your work. You should *not* expect to give equal time to all things you do. It’s reasonable and appropriate to focus on and spend more time in your strength areas and to delegate or minimize areas you are not as suited for: i.e., you will not be balanced. For example, if you are a very good communicator but poor at event planning, should you work harder at event planning, so you are as good (balanced) there as you are in your communication responsibilities? Well, we all know what happens with that strategy! You will perhaps excel in *neither* planning nor communication. The effort you could have put into building on your communication gifts are directed to an area of weakness and your strength area is neglected. So, yes, it is okay to be unbalanced in your varied job/ministry responsibilities.

You *should* be spending more time in your strength areas and less time (by delegating or abdicating) in areas for which you are not as suited/gifted: hence, you are out of balance. This opens the door wide for others to step into areas that don’t fit you very well. Your leadership role should be built around and based on how God has gifted you as a leader. All leaders are not created equal. We know that. Let’s shoot for balance as a team...as an organization, but not strive for balance within the realm of all aspects of leading. It is foolish and detrimental to try to be all things to all people as a leader. I am not strong at shepherding, but am strong at teaching and strategic planning. I am content not to try to be a great shepherd but let others step into that role. Now, depending on to whom you report, addressing the issue of not being balanced could lead to some heated, but healthy, discussion.

BALANCE IN YOUR LIFE

Balance in your life? Now, that's an entirely different issue. In his book "Your God is Too Safe," Mark Buchanan has this to say about Jesus: "Few of us possess the inner compass, map, calendar and clock Jesus had; there was Jesus—vigorous, yet relaxed, clear-eyed, yet dream-filled, purposeful and yet not driven." I believe the Lord Jesus was a "balanced person." He was not need-driven. He was not frustrated by the competing demands and expectations others placed on Him. He knew how to work and how to play, when to stay in a place and when to move on. He had a sense of when it was time to be with others and when it was time to be alone.

Most leaders I know are dangerously out of balance between their professional and personal lives. Time with God and time with family is regularly edged out by the demands of work and ministry. We are not living in the "Little House on the Prairie" but in the "little" house by the freeway. Our physical, emotional, and relational health is taking a regular beating. Lots of leaders are well beyond busy—they are utterly exhausted. As one person put it, "I am running on fumes and have no idea where the next gas station is." We need to do some "spring cleaning." Ego needs and people's needs are driving us to put more and more on our already full plates. Enough is enough already!

My counsel these days to myself and to the leaders I coach is:

1. Slow down. Go at a pace which is reasonable and realistic. Try to do less in a given amount of time. Smell the roses, enjoy the sunset, breathe more slowly, walk more slowly, eat more slowly.
2. Simplify. De-clutter your life. Get rid of things, both in your closet and garage, as well as in your schedule.
3. Say "yes" to less. "No" is a complete sentence! Say "no" to lots of things so you can say "yes" to a few things. What are the themes of your life? Stick with those. You'll be healthier and happier. Don't try to be the savior of the world. We already have one/One!
4. Seek solitude. There is too much noise in most of our lives. Don't be afraid of silence—it is still golden (maybe platinum by now!) We could use more of Simon and Garfunkel's "Sounds of Silence." Learn to be friends with yourself and your quiet thoughts.

Is balance to be sought after? Yes and no! Certainly, within life's responsibilities but not within your work responsibilities. Be the unique person God made you to be—not a carbon copy of every other leader.