

Life in Balance: Improving the Quality of Your Journey

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Disclosure

Neither I, nor any member of my immediate family, have any commercial financial relationships, which relate directly or indirectly, to the content of this presentation.

Learning Objectives

At the end of the presentation, the learner will be able to:

1. Promote professional development for diverse health care workers by implementing stress-reduction strategies to increase personal fulfillment, enhance productivity, prevent burnout, align priorities and values, promote resilience, and practice self-care.
2. Equip diverse health care workers to more effectively support breastfeeding mothers at risk for increased levels of stress that contribute to early weaning.

My Own Journey into Role Overload

- Influenced by new gender role opportunities on the cusp of the Women's Movement
- Early marriage and motherhood, while still a pre-medical student
- 5th child born on last day of pediatric residency
- The personal price of chronic role overload
- The life lessons that have emerged from my own informed, examined experience

The Rewards of a Balanced Integrated Life

- Life balance is fundamental to our emotional and physical health and well-being.
- Life balance promotes personal happiness and enhances our workplace productivity.
- Our own positive example can serve as a healthy model for countless others within our sphere of influence.

1. Commonly Identified Sources of Stress

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| □ Money | □ Housing Costs |
| □ Work | □ Personal Safety |
| □ The Economy | □ Significant Life Adjustments |
| □ Relationships | □ Unrealistic Expectations |
| □ Family and Caretaker Responsibilities | □ Chronic Sleep Deprivation |
| □ Family Health Problems | □ Daily Irritants, i.e. Long Commute |
| □ Personal Health Concerns | □ Overweight, Depression |
| □ Job Stability | |

Changes in Sex Role Stereotypes

- While welcome changes in sex role stereotypes have increased options for both men and women, they also have created a whole new set of expectations that—in many cases—have pushed us into oppressive role overload.
- The Women's Movement not only opened opportunities for women to “be anything.” It created the new and unrealistic expectation that women had to be “everything.”

The Burden of the Superwoman Myth

- The Superwoman Myth is the unrealistic expectation that women not only can “do it all,” but they should “do it all with perfection.”
- Integral to the myth is the notion that anything less than perfection in any arena is the equivalent of failure.
- The expectations on our young families today, especially our young women, are greater than ever.

Repacking Our Bags for the Rest of Our Journey

- We need to keep our highest priorities foremost, and remove weighty, self-defeating behaviors that throw us off balance, including unrealistic expectations and perfectionism, need for approval, people pleasing, self-judgment, and self-denial.
- “The greatest gift you can give the world is a healthy you.” Caroline Myss, bestselling author and renowned speaker

Reflection Question

What personal price am I paying for trying to do too much?

2. Clarify Our Governing Values, Highest Purpose, and Life Mission

- The first step to achieving greater balance is to identify what we value most in life, our highest purpose, the glue that holds our life together... the target we aim for as we live our lives.
- Once we gain clarity about our governing values and highest ideals, it becomes far easier to set daily priorities that align our actions with our highest purposes.

Defining Our Life Mission

- Your organization has a mission statement to guide decisions about priorities, actions, and responsibilities. We, too, should have a life mission statement that encompasses our diverse roles, unique gifts, and highest purposes.
- Seeing our values reflected in the work we do and the choices we make contributes significantly toward feeling that we are living authentically.

“Psychology of Postponement”

- Many people become masters of delayed gratification.
- The “psychology of postponement” can obscure our true purpose, as we rationalize: *“This isn’t really ‘it.’ It will be ‘it’ when.....”*
- “The preferred time to live out what we value is NOW.”

The Full Life (The Ultimate Journey)

Seligman, Martin. *Authentic Happiness*. NY: Free Press, 2002.

1. Experiencing positive emotions about the past and the future and savoring positive feelings from life’s pleasures
2. Deriving abundant gratification from using our unique gifts and moral virtues—our signature strengths—in the major realms of our lives
(VIA Survey of Character Strengths
<https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/testcenter>)
3. Applying our signature strengths in service to something larger than ourselves, which gives our lives a fulfilling sense of purpose and meaning

Reflection

Write an inspiring mission statement encompassing all my life roles, signature strengths, and highest purposes.

3. Prioritize Our Daily Actions

- After we clarify our purpose, mission, and values, it becomes easier to prioritize our daily actions to live authentically and in sync with our values.
- Don’t let daily “urgent” tasks crowd out the “important” activities that give meaning and purpose to our lives and that will be remembered.
- Resolve to do more “important” things every day, and give timetables to the things that matter most!

10 – 10 – 10

- Priorities help us make simple decisions. *Not easy ones, but simple.*
- **10 – 10 – 10: 10 Minutes, 10 Months, 10 Years** by Suzy Welch. Scribner, 2010.
- “Every time I find myself in a situation where there appears to be no solution that will make everyone happy, **I ask myself 3 questions:**
- What are the consequences of my decision in 10 minutes?
- In 10 months?
- In 10 years?”

Re-Align Our Priorities to Resonate with Our Highest Purpose

- When we gain clarity about what we cherish most, we can make a life course correction and start to get our lives back on track by deliberately saying “No” to some *good* things in order to open a space to say “Yes” to our *best* thing.
- Whether and how we say “No” determines the quality of our lives.
- It’s easy to say “No” when there is a deeper “Yes” burning inside.

Don't Let "Good" Things Crowd Out Our "Best" Thing

- People who can't say "No" to good things in pursuit of their highest purposes discover that, if you aren't willing to live your own life, plenty of people are willing to live it for you by scheduling the time slots on *your* day planner in fulfillment of *their* priorities and mission.
- Don't let someone else's "good" thing keep us from our "best" thing.

The Power of a Positive "No"

William Ury. New York: Bantam, 2007

- An ordinary *No* begins with *No* and ends with *No*.
- A Positive *No* begins with *Yes* and ends with *Yes*:
Yes - No - Yes
- Yes:** "I am deeply committed to spending more time with Andrew during his Senior year this year."
- No:** "For this reason, I need to decline your request to serve on the Program Committee."
- Yes:** "I know now important the annual seminar is, and I heard Sally say she would like to help."

Reject the Burden of Perfectionism

- Perfectionism, with its exceedingly high expectations, siphons off essential energy and often takes a toll on our primary relationships, self-care practices, peace of mind, and our productivity.
- For most tasks, "good enough" is perfectly adequate.
- "Ring the bell that still can ring; forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." Leonard Cohen

Reject the Destructive Belief that "The More we Do, the More We Are"

- Being "too busy" fuels our sense of importance and gives us a special identity.
- When we doubt our own self-worth, we become vulnerable to pursuing significance by taking on too much to gain the approval of others.
- We may accept excessive responsibility because we are afraid to disappoint someone and are overly concerned about their experience of us.
- When we take on a new responsibility, we need to put another commitment back into circulation.

Reflection Question

What are some *good* things that are keeping me from my *best* thing?

4. The Importance of Healthy Relationships for Emotional Health and Well-Being

- Our deepest needs are satisfied by our relationships, not our accomplishments. Healthy, balanced relationships give life its greatest meaning, foster our sense of community, and restore our sense of well-being.
- When our relationships aren't working, our productivity decreases and our health declines.
- "The best use of life is love. The best expression of love is time. The best time to love is now."

Rick Warren, author

4. Strengthen Your Primary Relationships

- Those who are burdened by toxic role overload have little time or emotional energy for nurturing even their most important relationships.
- “Be of love a little more careful than of anything.”
ee Cummings
- The Nurses’ Health Study from Harvard Medical School found the more friends women had, the less likely they were to develop physical impairments as they aged, and the more likely they were to be leading a joyful life.

Volunteer on Behalf of Others

- Making a positive difference in the lives of others is one of the most rewarding experiences life has to offer.
- “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.” *Albert Schweitzer, French-German theologian, organist, philosopher, and physician*
- “I’ve learned that you shouldn’t go through life with a catcher’s mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back.” *Dr. Maya Angelou, poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist*

Reflection Question

How can I use what I am learning to improve my relationships?

5. Change Your Thinking

- “My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never actually happened.”
Mark Twain, Winston Churchill, and many more
- “It is ills that never happened that have mostly made men miserable.”
Martin Farquhar Tupper, English writer and poet, 1800
- “There is nothing either good nor bad, but thinking makes it so.” *William Shakespeare*
- Our jobs, relationships, finances, health, etc. do not cause our stress. *Rather, it is our thoughts about these things that is the source of our stress.*

We Can Change the Story We Choose to Tell About Events that “Throw Us Off Balance”

- **Events** (things that happen in our lives) +
- **Responses** (our interpretation of the event and emotional response, thoughts, beliefs) =
- **Outcomes** (how we feel, the actions we take, the way we decide to “show up” for life each day)

Stress does not come from the events in our lives. **Stress comes from the story we choose to tell ourselves to give meaning to the events in our lives.**

The Myth of Psychological Stress

- ***All psychological stress is an inside job.***
- Stress is not a function of our circumstances. It is the result of the beliefs and assumptions we hold about the world.
- Until there is a thought, there is no stress.
- If we feel stress, it is because of something we are thinking. Are we willing to challenge our thoughts and assumptions?

Andrew Bernstein. The Myth of Stress. 2010.

Changing Your Attitude About a “Perceived” Challenging Situation

- “Am I aware of my present attitude toward this situation?” “If necessary, am I willing to change my attitude?”
- Use the technique of **reframing** to change your perception of being a victim or a martyr.
- Think of a recent challenging situation in your personal or work life. Pause, reflect, stretch your imagination, and write down **10 positive things that did result or could result** from this potentially negative circumstance. Now let the positives become possibilities in your thinking about the situation.

Alex Paattakos, PhD. *Prisoners of Our Thoughts*. 2010.

Reflection Question

Am I willing to change my thinking about a situation in my life that I currently view as stressful?

6. Practice Self-Care and Self-Compassion

- We nurture others from our own emotional overflow.
- Taking better care of ourselves energizes us to give more effectively to others.
- Life-giving coping mechanisms help us to:
 - 1) process difficult feelings and challenge faulty thinking;
 - 2) raise our self-esteem; and
 - 3) enhance emotional intimacy.

6. Practice Self-Care and Self-Compassion!

- Life-depleting coping mechanisms numb or suppress difficult feelings instead of helping us process them. Because these coping strategies often are shame-based and involve deceit, they 1) lower our self-esteem and 2) erode our cherished relationships by 3) interfering with emotional intimacy.
- Examples: angry outbursts; withdrawal/isolation; and compulsions like substance abuse, shopping, TV bingeing, gambling, pornography, computer games, workaholism, and eating disorders

Adopt and Attitude of Gratitude

- “When you focus on what’s working in your life, you get more of a life that works.”
Martin Seligman, PhD, father of Positive Psychology
- Keeping a gratitude journal rewires your brain to search for the positives.
- Make fewer judgments about the events in your life, and look for the positives in every challenging situation.

Cultivate a Humor Perspective

- Laughter diffuses tension, lights up your face, relaxes your muscles, restores your perspective, shrinks your problems, buoys your spirits, aids in healing, and boosts the immune system.
- Humor has been likened to the balance pole used by performers in a high-wire act. It’s necessary to navigate the, often precarious, “tightrope of life.”

Practice Mindfulness

- In rushing through our busy days, it's easy to lose our connection with the present moment and not notice what we are doing or how we are feeling.
- Mindfulness is the practice of purposely focusing on the present moment, and accepting it without judgment.
- Practicing mindfulness can evoke the relaxation response and has been shown to improve both physical and psychological symptoms.

RD Siegel (Medical Ed). *Positive Psychology*. Harvard Medical School, 2009

Mindful Breathing Exercise

- Sit in a relaxed, comfortable position, in a quiet spot, on a chair or a cushion on the floor, with your hands resting on your thighs, and your back and neck straight. Your eyes can be open or closed.
- Breathe deeply through your nose or mouth, letting your stomach rise with each breath, and release the air slowly (nose or mouth). For 5 to 20 minutes, try to keep your focus on your slow, deep breathing.
- When your mind wanders, simply acknowledge your intrusive thoughts without judgment, and gently bring your focus back to your breathing.

Self-Compassion

Kristin Neff. *Self Compassion*. William Morrow Paperbacks, 2015

- Recognize our struggles with perfectionism, fear of failure, or inadequacy, and begin practicing *compassionate self-talk* to refute our inner critic.
- When we recognize that we are experiencing a moment of pain, we can give ourselves the support we would offer another to enable us to bear the pain and be transformed by the experience.
- Silently offer an encouraging word ("May I be kind to myself in this moment of suffering"), place a hand on your cheek or heart, or give yourself a hug.

Additional Self-Care Practices

- Talking with friends or a therapist
- EST (Magic Pill)
 - ▣ Exercise
 - ▣ Adequate Sleep
 - ▣ Human Touch
- Healthy eating; reading; pampering (massage, bubble bath, manicure); practicing one's faith; music; hobbies; movies; pets; volunteering; yoga; spending time with nature

Reflection Question

What do I commit to begin doing to take better care of myself?

Action Promise to Improve the Quality of Your Journey

What steps do I commit to take to reduce my self-imposed expectations, live in sync with my values, improve my relationships, change my negative thoughts, and practice essential self-care?

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