

Dr Mahendra Perera's Guide to Work Life Balance

REMAINING SANE IN THE FAST LANE



INTRODUCTION

We need to work to pay the bills and get food on the table. Unfortunately, work is and can be viewed as a four letter swear word, rather than a blessing!

In this guide, which is intended as a follow-up to a half-day workshop, I will explore with you, principles and practical techniques that will enable you to deal with and manage work related stresses.

Although during the week almost one-third of the day is taken up with our employment related activities, there is another two-thirds left and this is the time one devotes to one's self and family matters.

Throughout this guide you will have an opportunity to reflect on problems and difficulties that you face both at home and at work. You will also be able to learn techniques that are helpful in maintaining good health with minimal financial costs.

If you have any specific questions related to work life balance, or would like to schedule a workshop for your organization, please feel free to email me at: mahendra@mahendraperera.com or submit an inquiry through my website <https://mahendraperera.com>, where you can find more information on reducing stress and creating a better work life balance.

PROBLEMS



What are some of the common problems we face?

- Work overload
- Lack of support from managers
- Customer complaints
- Political interference

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PURPOSE/ PASSION & GOAL/S*

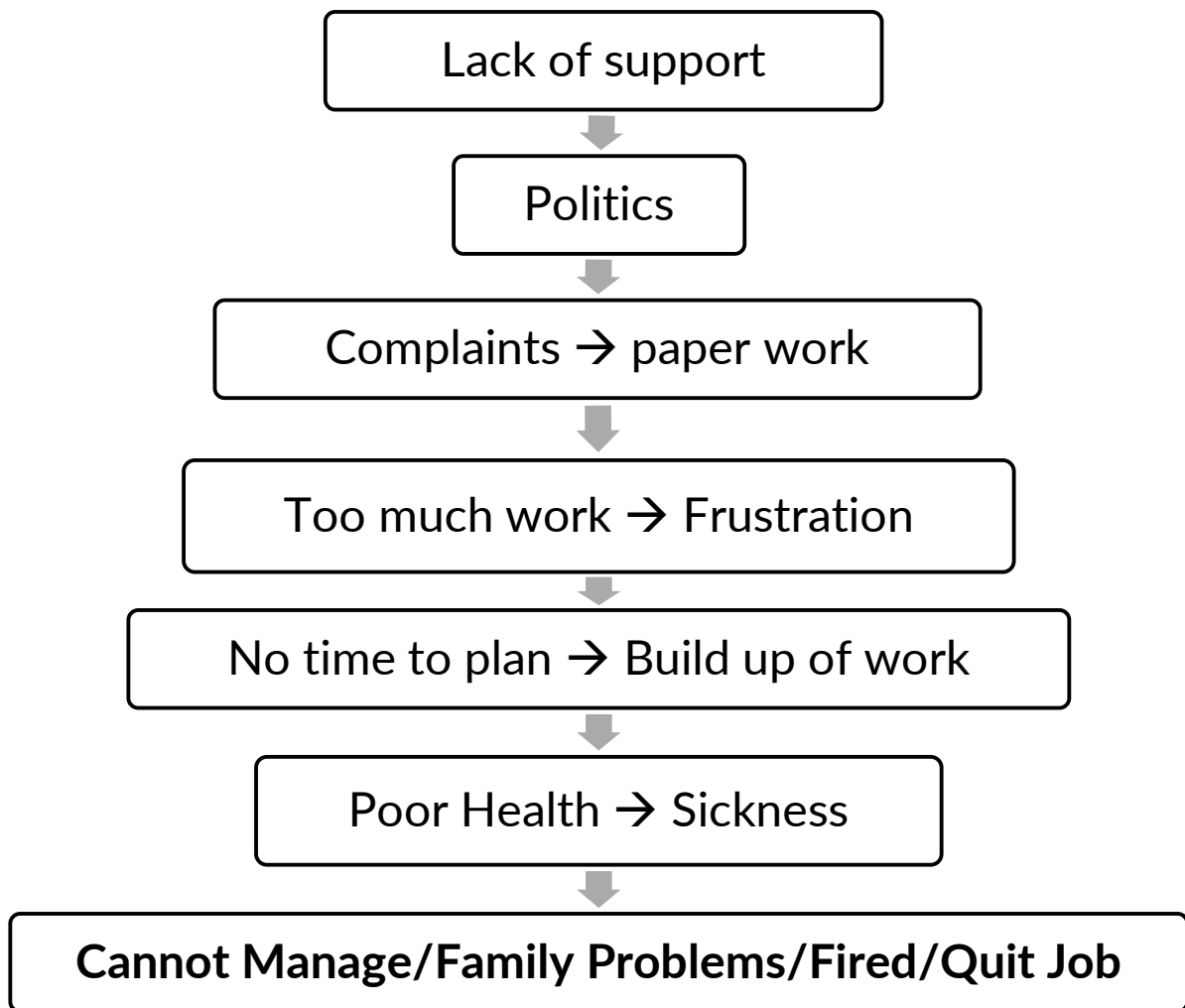
- We need to have a purpose in life
- **Write down as of now the major purpose in your life**
- You should identify 3 major goals and then note how you will work towards achieving these goals.
- This is like the foundation when you are building a house...The first principle.

Write down a goal and how you plan to achieve it, for example:

I WOULD LIKE TO LEARN_____

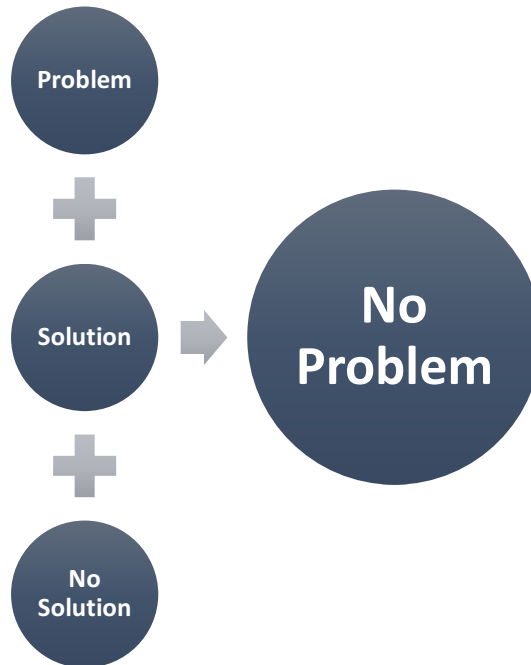
- Set a time and frequency
- Make contact with a tutor and determine costs
- Check with your family of the feasibility
- Decide on a start date
- Have a recurring diary entry with a reminder
- Review progress in one month: is it working? What do I need to do differently?

IS THIS WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU AT WORK?



When I say “Remaining Sane in the Fast Lane”, the “fast lane” primarily refers to your **work**. Of course, **home** may be faster than work for some people. There was one staff member who came to work when they were sick (but stayed in their office) saying that it was more peaceful at the workplace!!

PROBLEM?



IN SEARCH OF SOLUTIONS...

PROBLEM SOLVING

On the following two pages you will find a method for problem solving as well as worksheet to help you track the solutions.

IN SEARCH OF SOLUTIONS

PROBLEMS → narrow them down to one step at a time:

A PROBLEM

- Are there probable solutions to this problem: **Yes/No**
- If **No** then there is NO PROBLEM, because a problem by definition will have solutions
- The problem ceases to be a problem and becomes fact.
- Then you accept it, and it ceases to be YOUR problem.

SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION

- **Yes**, there are solutions that I can think of.
- List out the solutions that you could think of – no more than 3 – 5 (see the worksheet on the next page)
- Select the solution that is most likely to work
- Then list out the steps that you will take to work towards the solution and give a time frame
- If it does work, then problem solved
- If the problem is not worked out, there is more time required, how much?
- Or, review the process and see what you learnt and renew your effort

UNDERSTAND THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS

PROBLEM SOLVING WORKSHEET

Write down a problem, then note solutions and then the pros and cons of each. After choosing a solution, you will need to review it if it is workable.

| Problem | Solution/s | Pros and Cons | Selected Solution | Review Date |
|---------|------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Once you have a system with a working solution/s, then you have success dealing with the issue – **problem solved**.

GET ON WITH THE JOB

A TECHNIQUE

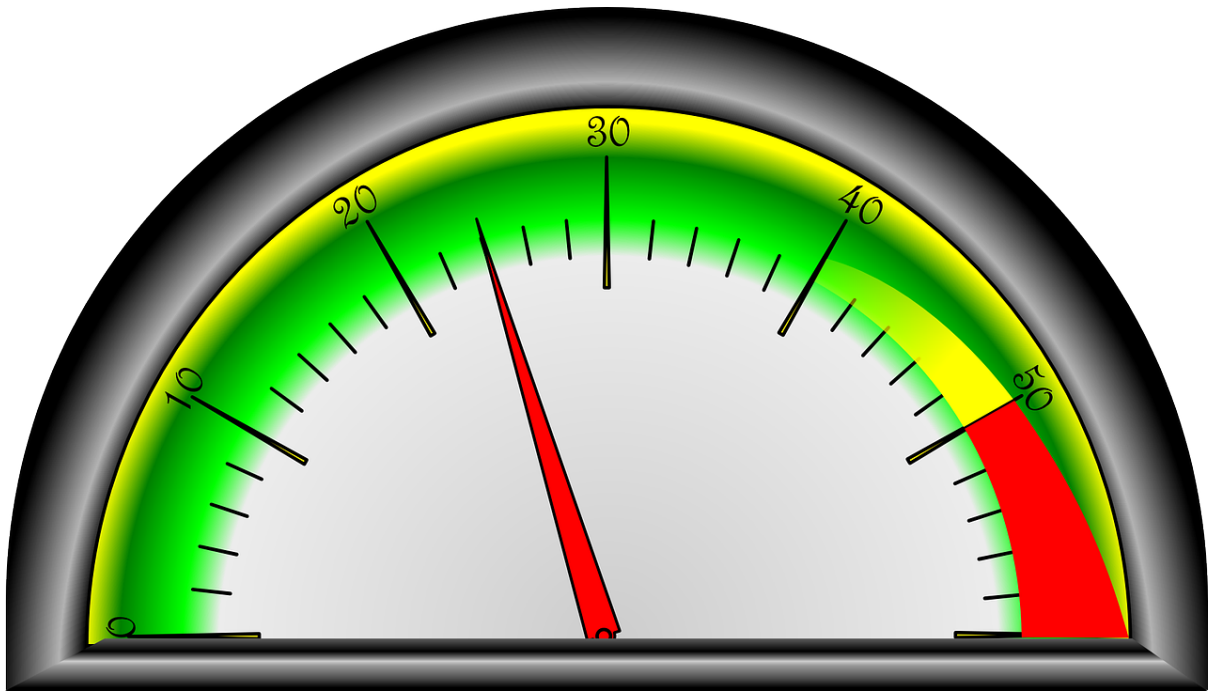


- Everyone gets enough **exercise**
- Jumping to conclusions
- Flying off the handle
- Running down the boss
- Dodging responsibilities and
- Pushing their luck

Some people tend to complain – how hard life is, the boss is too demanding, too much paperwork, etc.

You've got to do the work anyway = 1 Problem
Complaining is another problem = 2 Problems instead of 1 !!

KNOW YOUR LIMITS



I CAN TAKE ON MORE || SWEET SPOT || OVERLOAD & BURNOUT

Do you think you have hit the “sweet spot” at work? Don’t bite off more than you can chew.

A simple exercise: take a rubber band and stretch it. Notice how it behaves differently at the limits **before** it breaks. Learn to gauge your stress and know the warning signs for when you are near overload!!

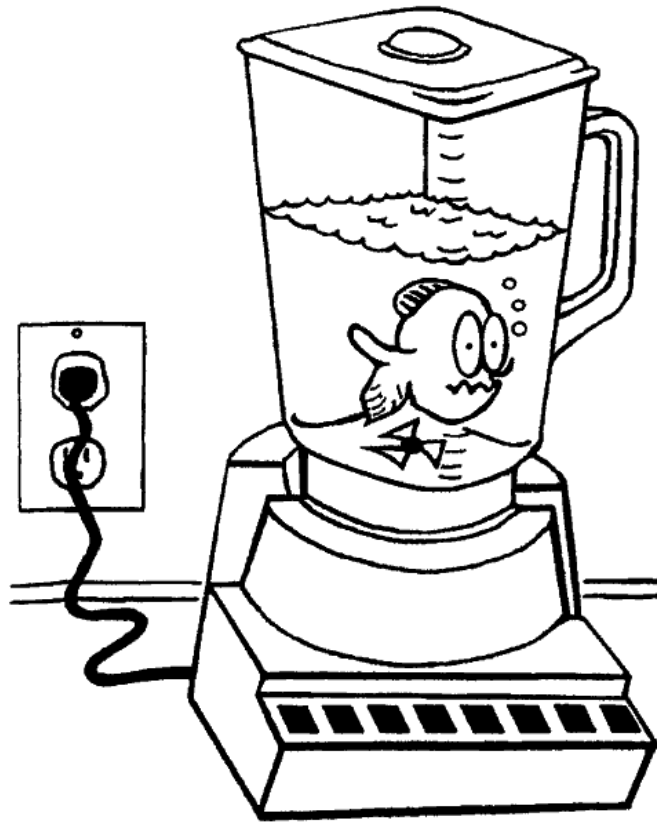
STRESS

Let's examine some potential sources of stress. On the next page you will find a worksheet to help you identify the sources of stress in your life.

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF STRESS

| | | |
|------|--|--------------------|
| Date | | |
| | <i>Rate from 0 to 10 where 0 = not relevant and 10= extremely severe</i> | <i>Your Rating</i> |
| | | |
| 1 | Work Overload | |
| | | |
| 2 | Inadequate Support from Superior/s | |
| | | |
| 3 | Lack of recognition of the work done | |
| | | |
| 4 | Uncertainty of Role/expectation | |
| | | |
| 5 | Problems with Boss/es | |
| | | |
| 6 | Problems with peers/those doing work at your level | |
| | | |
| 7 | Problems with 'minor staff'/juniors | |
| | | |
| 8 | Unsafe working environments | |
| | | |
| 9 | Lack of Opporutinities for advancement | |
| | | |
| 10 | Fear of losing the job | |
| | | |
| 11 | Other please specify and rank | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

and you think you've
got stress...



Put it in perspective:

Where can you find the only people
without worries?

In the **cemetery.**

STRESS IS A PERCEPTION

**When possible:
Learn to consider different explanations
or
Change your own views**

On the following two pages, we will look at two exercises for **thinking** and **dealing** with stress. Whether you follow these techniques, or use similar processes, you should have a means – a method, system, series of practices – to manage your stress before it results in overload or burnout.

A WAY OF THINKING

Start by writing down something that made you angry. Now, go through the steps below and see if you can “reengineer” your thought processes.

- Is it correct / are their facts?
- Is there another way of looking at it?
- Does it really matter to me / is it worth getting angry about this?
- What would I tell someone else who is dealing with a similar problem?
- Is this way of thinking helpful to me?

Once you are done thinking it through, take a moment to sit and read a book, workout, or choose some other favorite activity that helps you feel relaxed.

- Let off steam in a safe environment

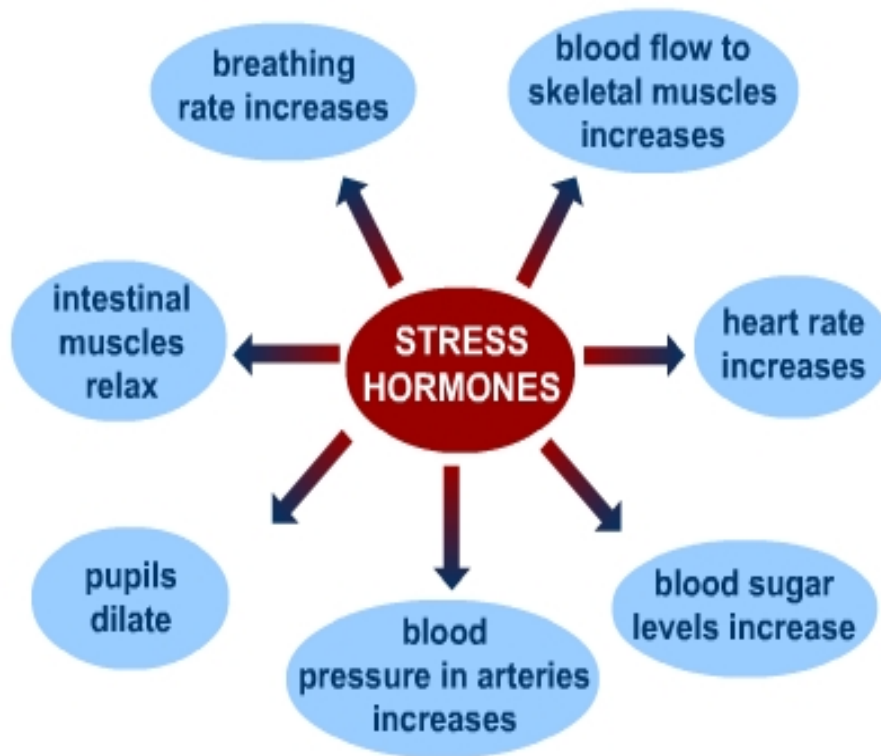
A WAY OF DEALING

Now, write down another action or inaction that made you angry. For example, a letter or invoice that was not sent on time. Review the steps below.

- Pause/think before responding
- Take a few deep breaths
- Get away for a time if you can
- Get helpful advice from a trusted source
- If the criticism was justified – accept/apologise
- **DEAL with the ISSUE**

Could you have applied any of these techniques to deal with the stress?
If no, why not?

BODILY RESPONSES TO STRESS



In the diagram above, you can see how the various systems of the body react adversely to stress.

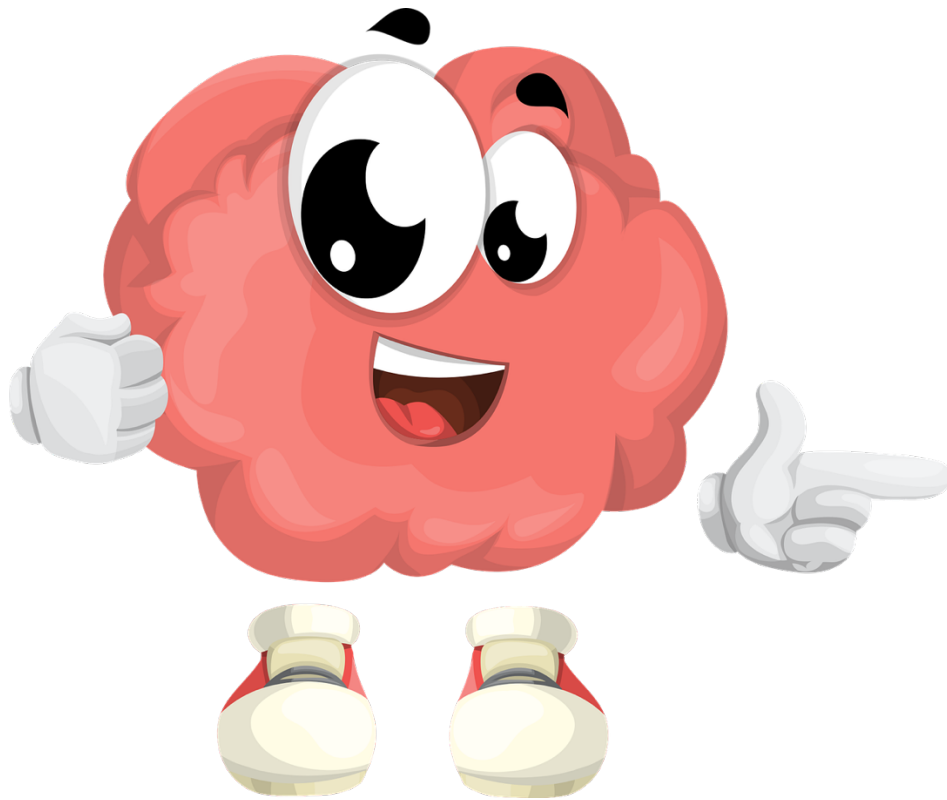
It's natural for our bodies to react to the way we are feeling.

For example, some people may feel a sudden urge to use the toilet before an important interview. They may be feeling anxious or nervous: "What questions will the panel ask me during the interview?"

The important part is noticing the warning signs of stress before it impacts our health.

Can you think of any physical illness you have that is being made worse due to stress? How can you deal with the issue and feel better?

A HEALTHY BRAIN IN A HEALTHY BODY



On the following page are a series of questions that will provide insights on whether you are living a healthy lifestyle, particularly with regards to the impact of stress on your life.

SELF-EVALUATION OF HEALTH

The following questions refer to an average working day.

- How many hours of sleep do you usually get?
- What time do you go to bed?
- What time do you wake up?
- Do you eat breakfast?
- How much time does it take?
- Do you eat lunch?
- How much time does it take?
- Do you have a break after lunch?
- Do you eat while working or rush back to work?
- Do you take your work home?
 - a) All of the time
 - b) Most of the time
 - c) Some of the time
 - d) Rarely
 - e) Never
- How much time do you spend on relaxation?
- How much time do you spend on exercise?
- How much time do you devote to religious or spiritual activity?

For a simple look at your physical health, you can calculate your body mass index and check your waste size. These measurements will vary according to body type and other factors. This is not meant for comparison. These measurements are taken to see where you are relative to your health:

- Height
- Weight
- Calculate BMI = weight (kg)/height (m²)
- Waist circumference

CAN YOU RELATE TO THIS PICTURE?



When you are constantly “in a rush” or under stress, your work, and ultimately your life and health begin to suffer.

On the following page is a worksheet which will help you identify the techniques you use to relax. Some are healthier than others. Your responses will provide insights into whether your approach to dealing with stress is healthy, or may be causing your health to suffer more.

METHODS OF RELAXATION

| Date | | Used | If Used |
|------|--|--------|-------------|
| | <i>Rate from 0 to 10 where 0 = not relevant and 10= extremely severe</i> | Yes/No | Your rating |
| 1 | Alcohol | | |
| 2 | Cigarettes | | |
| 3 | Drinking Coffee | | |
| 4 | Drinking Tea | | |
| 5 | Other non-prescription drugs | | |
| 6 | Doctor's Medicine | | |
| 7 | Discussing with friends | | |
| 8 | Talking with people causing the stress | | |
| 9 | Telling your partner | | |
| 10 | Having an affair | | |
| 11 | Working extra hours | | |
| 12 | Not completing work | | |
| 13 | Taking Sick Leave | | |
| 14 | Other Please list below and rate | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

ACTIVITY SCHEDULE

How you schedule your activities can also reveal whether you are living a healthy lifestyle with a good balance between work and life. Review the activities below and how they fit into a typical **weekday** or **weekend/holiday**.

Make a note next to each activity and whether you need to improve or change anything in your scheduling. On the following page is an exercise that will help you implement any necessary improvements.

Weekday

- Work
- Travel
- Leisure
- Sustenance
- Sleep

Weekend/Holiday

- Leisure/Family Time
- Religious Activity
- Exercise
- Socialising

DAILY PLANNER

This exercise will help you improve your scheduling to reduce stress and enjoy a better work life balance.

PLAN YOUR IDEAL WORK DAY

1. Focus primarily on time.
2. What time do you wake up, shower, breakfast, sleep, etc.
3. Consider this to be like a “time table”.
4. Then, check the time table you’ve created against your daily schedule.
5. Adjust some of your daily activities to be closer to your “ideal.”

PLAN YOUR IDEAL WEEKEND DAY/HOLIDAY

1. Ask yourself the same questions above, and compare them to your typical weekend and holiday schedule.
2. It is important to schedule time for leisure activities, socialising, exercise and family time too!

If you do not have a schedule, then perhaps it is time to make one. Use these answers as a “rough draft” and then fine tune the scheduling based on your experience putting it into practice.

It is a given that life is not to be lived according to an exact time table. The concept here is to **have a plan** so that each day will be in better focus and not so chaotic.

We acknowledge that every day is not the same and the “time table” approach is not applicable to all situations. However, the principle can certainly be utilised anywhere at any time.

WORKPLACE ECONOMICS

The economics of the workplace put pressure on us to achieve and constantly “do more,” although it may not be entirely productive and the result can a drop in productivity as well as increased stress.

1. One Person
2. Does the work of at least three
3. Get's paid twice as much
4. Can you manage the “Fast Lane?”

The feeling that often results from overwork is:

“I don't have enough time”

DOWN SIZE

Less is not always more, especially when it comes to people working together.

THE REPORT OF A WORK STUDY CONSULTANT

There is a story of a company chairman who was given a ticket for a performance of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony. He couldn't go, and passed on the invitation to the company's work-study consultant. The next morning the chairman asked him how he enjoyed it, and instead of a few plausible observations was handed a memorandum, which read:

- a) For considerable periods the four oboe players had nothing to do. The number should be reduced, and their work spread over the whole orchestra, thus eliminating peaks of inactivity.
- b) All twelve violins were playing identical notes. This seems unnecessary duplication, and the staff of this section should be drastically cut. If a large volume of sound is really required, this could be obtained through an electronic amplifier.
- c) Much effort was absorbed in the playing of demi-semiquavers. This seems an excessive refinement, and it is recommended that all notes should be rounded up to the nearest semiquaver. If this were done it should be possible to use trainees and low-grade operators.
- d) No useful purpose is served by repeating with horns the passages that have already been handled by the strings. If all such redundant passages were eliminated, the concert could be reduced from two hours to twenty minutes.

If only Schubert had consulted a work-study expert, he would probably have been able to finish his symphony after all!

A QUESTION OF TIME

WHAT CAN YOU ACCOMPLISH
IN 1 MINUTE, 1 HOUR?



Imagine that you are chopping down a tree with a blunt axe. It would take a lot longer to chop down. You might get frustrated with the process. Quite often the question of time is a matter of:

TECHNIQUE

To achieve work life balance, the most important thing is that you:

PLAN

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STRATEGIES

Whether you call it a **technique** or a **strategy**, how much time do you actually spend planning the next day?

This includes and is especially important for your free time. Are you prepared to use your free time?

Here are some tips to help you get started planning:

- Plan tomorrow when you go to bed tonight
- Write down what you will do and when
- Keep diaries of your appointments
- Make time for friends/spouse/children
- Weekly shopping schedule
- **Activity free half-day**

There are many different systems that can be used to track time and activities. You've likely seen different project management or time log systems at your work. On the following page is a planner to help you schedule your time **away from work**.

PLANNER

| | Weekdays | | | | | | Weekend | |
|---------|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|---------|-----|
| Time | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | | Sat | Sun |
| 4am | | | | | | 5am | | |
| 5am | | | | | | 6am | | |
| 6am | | | | | | 7am | | |
| 7am | | | | | | 8am | | |
| 8am | | | | | | 9am | | |
| AT WORK | | | | | | 10am | | |
| 4pm | | | | | | 11am | | |
| 5pm | | | | | | 12 noon | | |
| 6pm | | | | | | 1pm | | |
| 7pm | | | | | | 2pm | | |
| 8pm | | | | | | 3pm | | |
| 9pm | | | | | | 4pm | | |
| 10pm | | | | | | 5pm | | |
| 11pm | | | | | | 6pm | | |
| | | | | | | 7pm | | |
| | | | | | | 8pm | | |
| | | | | | | 9pm | | |
| | | | | | | 10pm | | |
| | | | | | | 11pm | | |

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MAKING THE MOST OF THE DAY

| TIME SAVER | ACTIVITY |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Travel• Meetings• Waiting for...• Household tasks | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading• Listening• Planning• Relaxing |

*I'm told there are people who have a
36-hour day, I have yet to find them!*

MAXIMISE YOUR TIME

Looking at the list above, how can you maximise your time during these activities?

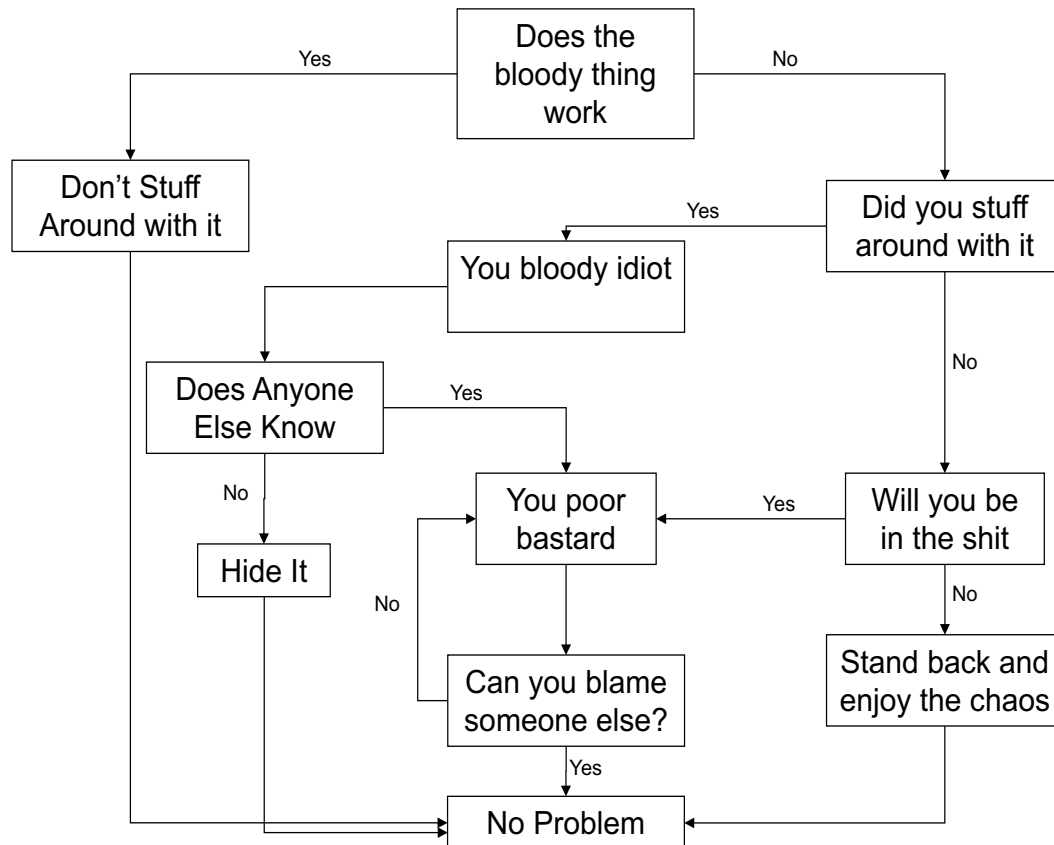
What simple steps can you take to **save time** for the **activities** that bring balance to your work life?

A VERY USEFUL TIP

*Don't trouble trouble,
'til trouble troubles you*

With many unexpected events in our lives, there is no need to search for **problems**. We ought to stay focused on the **solutions** we can apply readily in our lives.

PROBLEM OR NO PROBLEM?



HOW DO YOU COPE?

The 80/20 Rule

**80% of stress comes from
20% of our problems**

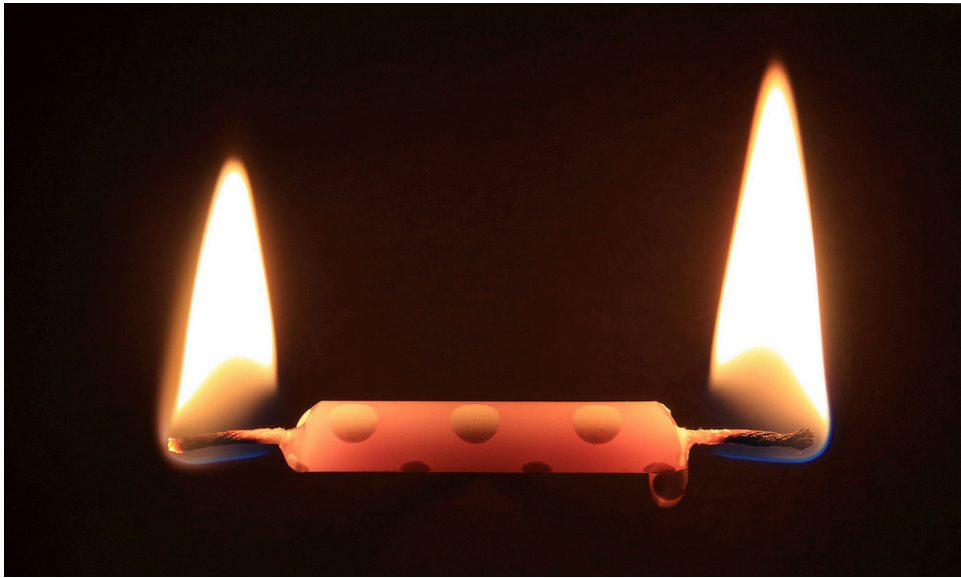
Now think about it for a moment.

Are the problems we see really as big as we perceive?

Are they so great in number that we cannot find a solution?

YOUR HEALTH

What's this?



What does it signify?

What are the things you can do to avoid
this from happening?

*Photo courtesy gfpeck on Flickr

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FOOD



INEXPENSIVE HEALTHY CHOICES

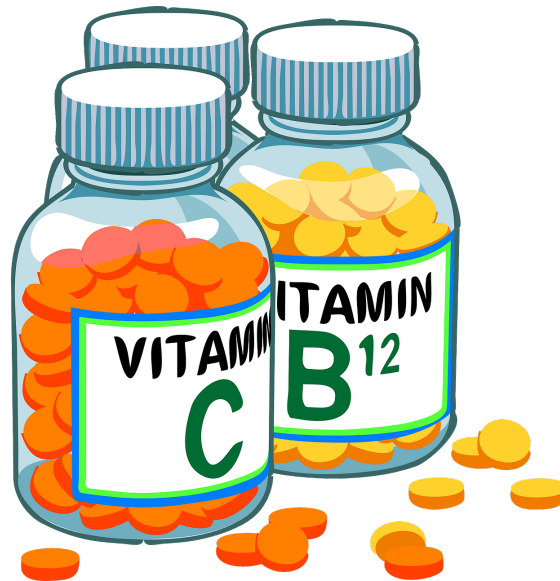


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VITAMINS



What types of vitamins and supplements do you use? Do they provide you a benefit? Were they recommended by someone else?

The best vitamins naturally come from healthy food:



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EXERCISE

Which would you
rather see on a daily basis?



or



**30 minutes of exercise each day
is the easy way...**

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TAKE IT EASY



Relaxation training needs to occur when you are relaxed so that you can draw on your experience when stressed. It is like a savings account at a bank. You put money in when you are able, so that it can be withdrawn later when you are in a tight situation.

Take 5 minutes off from your busy schedule each day. IF you can, make it three times a day. Even that is only about 1% of the 24 hrs in each day. Sit or look out at nature or just take time to breathe, deeply in and out. Try to enjoy the time.

Another technique that can help is to sit quietly for 5 minutes after each meal. This will help with digestion and also give you a sense of well-being. Enjoy the activity rather than making it a chore – or something that **MUST BE DONE** for the sake of doing it.

Don't forget gentle stretching exercises: these can be performed at any time, any place, in an unobtrusive manner.

Try these relaxation techniques for 30 days and see if they make a difference. See what works best for you and your schedule.

***Row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream***

ADDITIONAL LINKS AND READING MATERIAL

Tim Ferris – *The Four Hour Work Week*; his other books; and [website](#) – A modern epic of self-development, not for the faint hearted

Brian Tracy – *Time Management; Leadership; [Eat That Frog](#)* – Time management

Cheryl Richardson – [Finding Your Passion](#) – Personal development with work life balance

Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson – [The One Minute Manager Meets the Monkey](#) – Management and working with others

Harry Paul, Stephen C Lundin, John Christensen – [Fish!: A Proven Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results](#) – Fictional narrative with lessons on improving engagement at work; and *Fish! Tales*, which contains real-life examples

Atul Gwnade – [Check List Manifesto](#) – Problem solving model

Mark Goulston – [Just Listen](#) – Communication principles

Thich Nhat Hanh – [The Art of Communicating](#) – Examples for mindful listening and communication