



# WELLNESS WORKS....

## at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

A Publication from Brain Injury Community Re-entry Niagara's Wellness Works Committee

February 2009

# Work-Life Balance

## How work invades your personal life

There was a time when employees showed up for work Monday through Friday and worked eight- to nine-hour days. The boundaries between work and home were fairly clear then. But the world has changed and, unfortunately, the boundaries have blurred for many workers. Here's why:

- **Global economy.** As more skilled workers enter the global labor market and companies outsource or move more jobs to reduce labor costs, people feel pressured to work longer and produce more just to protect their jobs.
- **International business.** Work continues around the world 24 hours a day for some people. If you work in an international organization, you might be on call around the clock for troubleshooting or consulting.
- **Advanced communication technology.** Many people now have the ability to work anywhere — from their home, from their car and even on vacation. And some managers expect this.
- **Longer hours.** Employers commonly ask employees to work longer hours than they're scheduled. Often, overtime is mandatory. If you hope to move up the career ladder, you may find yourself regularly working more than 40 hours a week to achieve and exceed expectations.
- **Changes in family roles.** Today's married worker is typically part of a dual-career couple, which makes it difficult to find time to meet commitments to family, friends and community.

## Married to your work

It can be tempting to rack up the hours at work — especially if you're trying to earn a promotion or some extra money for a child's education or a dream vacation. For others, working more hours feels necessary in order to manage the workload.

But if you're spending most of your time at work, your home life will likely pay the price. Consider the pros and cons of working extra hours on your work-life balance:

- **Fatigue.** Your ability to think and your eye-hand coordination decrease when you're tired. This means you're less productive and may make more mistakes. These mistakes can lead to injury or rework and negatively impact your professional reputation.
- **Family.** You may miss out on important events, such as your child's first bike ride, your father's 60th birthday or your high-school reunion. Missing out on important milestones may harm relationships with your loved ones.
- **Friends.** Trusted friends are a key part of your support system. But if you're spending time at the office instead of with them, you'll find it difficult to nurture those friendships.
- **Expectations.** If you regularly work extra hours, you may be given more responsibility. This could create a never-ending and increasing cycle, causing more concerns and challenges.



# WELLNESS WORKS...

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

## Striking the best work-life balance

Here are some ideas to help you find the balance that's best for you:

- **Keep a log.** Track everything you do for one week. Include work-related and non-work-related activities. Decide what's necessary and what satisfies you the most. Cut or delegate activities you don't enjoy and don't have time for. If you don't have the authority to make certain decisions, talk to your supervisor.
- **Take advantage of your options.** Find out if your employer offers flex hours, a compressed workweek, job-sharing or telecommuting for your role. The flexibility may alleviate some of your stress and free up some time.
- **Learn to say no.** Whether it's a co-worker asking you to spearhead an extra project or your child's teacher asking you to manage the class play, remember that it's OK to respectfully say no. When you quit doing the things you only do out of guilt or a false sense of obligation, you'll make more room in your life for the activities that are meaningful to you and bring you joy.
- **Leave work at work.** With today's global business mentality and the technology to connect to anyone at any time from virtually anywhere, there's no boundary between work and home — unless you create it. Make a conscious decision to separate work time from personal time. When with your family, for instance, turn off your cell phone and put away your laptop computer.
- **Manage your time.** Organize household tasks efficiently. Doing one or two loads of laundry every day, rather than saving it all for your day off, and running errands in batches are good places to begin. A weekly family calendar of important dates and a daily list of to-dos will help you avoid deadline panic. If your employer offers a course in time management, sign up for it.
- **Rethink your cleaning standards.** An unmade bed or sink of dirty dishes won't impact the quality of your life. Do what needs to be done and let the rest go. If you can afford it, pay someone else to clean your house.
- **Communicate clearly.** Limit time-consuming misunderstandings by communicating clearly and listening carefully. Take notes if necessary.
- **Fight the guilt.** Remember, having a family and a job is OK — for both men and women.
- **Nurture yourself.** Set aside time each day for an activity that you enjoy, such as walking, working out or listening to music. Unwind after a hectic workday by reading, practicing yoga, or taking a bath or shower.

*(Continued on Next Page)*

## Take this quiz to see if you're in balance!

Identify whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. I feel like I have a lot of control over my work life.
2. I enjoy hobbies or interests outside of work.
3. I often feel guilty because I can't make time for everything I want to.
4. I rarely feel anxious or upset because of what is happening at work.
5. I usually have enough time to spend with my loved ones.
6. When I'm at home, I feel relaxed and comfortable.
7. I have time to do something just for me every week.
8. I rarely feel overwhelmed and over-committed.
9. I rarely lose my temper at work.
10. I usually use my allotted vacation days.
11. I rarely feel exhausted — especially early in the week.
12. I rarely work through my lunch break.
13. I rarely miss out on important family events because of work.
14. I try not to think about work when I'm not working.
15. My family rarely gets upset about how much time I spend working.

*To see how balanced your life is, count the number of times you agreed to the statements above.*

**0-5:** Your life is out of balance — you need to make significant changes to find your equilibrium. But you can take control!

**6-10:** You're keeping things under control — but only barely. Now is the time to take action before you're knocked off balance.

**11-15:** You're on the right track! You've been able to achieve work-life balance, now make sure you protect it.



# WELLNESS WORKS...

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

(Continued From Previous Page)

- **Set aside one night each week for recreation.** Take the phone off the hook, power down the computer and turn off the TV. Discover activities you can do with your partner, family or friends, such as playing golf, fishing or canoeing. Making time for activities you enjoy will rejuvenate you.
- **Protect your day off.** Try to schedule some of your routine chores on workdays so that your days off are more relaxing.
- **Get enough sleep.** There's nothing as stressful and potentially dangerous as working when you're sleep-deprived. Not only is your productivity affected, but also you can make costly mistakes. You may then have to work even more hours to make up for these mistakes.
- **Bolster your support system.** Give yourself the gift of a trusted friend or co-worker to talk with during times of stress or hardship. Ensure you have trusted friends and relatives who can assist you when you need to work overtime or travel for your job.
- **Seek professional help.** Everyone needs help from time to time. If your life feels too chaotic to manage and you're spinning your wheels worrying about it, talk with a professional, such as your doctor, a psychologist or a counselor recommended by your employee assistance program (EAP).



“It’s not the time you put in, but what you put in the time.”

— *Burg’s Philosophy*



# WELLNESS WORKS...

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

## TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR WORK/LIFE IN BALANCE

Here are some tips to help you achieve a better balance in your life. Take a moment to read and reflect on these tips -- and then get your life in balance!

1. **Negotiate a Change with Your Current Employer.** Progressive employers recognize the value of good employees, and many are willing to find ways to help current employees deal with short-term or permanent changes caused by family situations. The changes can include flextime, job-sharing, telecommuting, or part-time employment. Your first step is to research your employer's policies and methods of handling previous requests. Then go to your boss armed with information and a plan that shows how you will be an even more valuable and productive employee if you can modify your current work situation.
2. **Slow Down.** Life is simply too short, so don't let things pass you in a blur. Take steps to stop and enjoy the things and people around you. Schedule more time between meetings; don't make plans for every evening or weekend, and find some ways to distance yourself from the things that are causing you the most stress.
3. **Learn to Better Manage Your Time. Avoid Procrastination.** For many people, most of the stress they feel comes from simply being disorganized -- and procrastinating. Learn to set more realistic goals and deadlines -- and then stick to them. You'll find that not only are you less stressed, but your work will be better.
4. **Share the Load.** Even though we may sometimes feel we're the only ones capable of doing something, it's usually not the case. Get your partner or other family members to help you with all your personal/family responsibilities. Taking care of the household, children, or parents should not be the responsibility of just one person.
5. **Let Things Go. (Don't Sweat the Small Stuff.)** It's simpler said than done, but learn to let things go once in a while. So what if the dishes don't get washed everyday or that the house doesn't get vacuumed every week. Learn to recognize the things that don't really have much impact in your life and allow yourself to let them go -- and then not beat yourself up for doing so.
6. **Explore Your Options. Get Help.** If you are feeling overwhelmed with your family responsibilities, please get help if you can afford it. Find a sitter for your children, explore options for aging parents, and seek counseling for yourself. In many cases, you have options, but you need to take the time to find them.
7. **Take Charge. Set Priorities.** Sometimes it's easier for us to allow ourselves to feel overwhelmed rather than taking charge and developing a prioritized list of things that need to get done. You need to buck the trend. Develop a list. Set priorities. And then enjoy the satisfaction of crossing things off your list.
8. **Simplify.** It seems human nature for just about everyone to take on too many tasks and responsibilities, to try to do too much, and to own too much. Find a way to simplify your life. Change your lifestyle. Learn to say no to requests for help. Get rid of the clutter and baggage in your house -- and your life.

**In the end, the key word is balance. You need to find the right balance that works for you. Celebrate your successes and don't dwell on your failures. Life is a process, and so is striving for balance in your life!!**

— By Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D., [Quintcarrers.com](http://Quintcarrers.com)