



The FSAP Update

a newsletter from the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program

Fall 2006

Finding Work-Life Balance

The Faculty and Staff Assistance Program provides assessment, brief counseling, and referral services for all faculty and staff regarding any personal or health-related problem which affects an individual's life and work.

FSAP services are free to faculty, staff, and family members and are completely confidential. The staff also provides consultation to supervisors when an employee's personal problems are affecting work performance or relationships. For more information or to make an appointment, call 545-0350.

It's Saturday morning at 8 a.m. and Bill is at the breakfast table with his family when his cell phone rings. It's his boss. There's an emergency at work and he's needed immediately. His son has a baseball game (his fourth, but Bill still hasn't found time to go); his daughter has a gymnastics class and desperately wants him there. His wife just looks at him and shakes her head. "What do I do now?" Bill says to himself.

It's 7 p.m. and Sarah isn't even halfway through the project she told her colleague, Jim, that she'd help finish. When she got the report it was barely started. She hasn't been able to concentrate on it, thinking about all the other things she was supposed to do that night. She'd agreed to make cupcakes for the PTA bake sale tomorrow. The kids' homework needed to be checked, and they'd have to fix it in the morning. Despite missing dinner with the family (again – she'd worked late every night this week),

she'd have a sink full of dishes to do whenever she made it home. The worst part was that her colleague, Jim, left at 6:30 p.m., saying he had an appointment he couldn't miss. He did, however, let the entire team (including the boss) know she was now working on the project. She wanted to turn off her computer and leave, but worried that if she didn't finish, it could really put her career on hold.

We live in a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week society, and it's easy to see how work can creep into our personal lives. In the past, employees came to work, put in eight hours and then went home to spend time with their families. Today, the boundaries are blurred, for reasons including a global economy, two-income families, longer work hours and technologies including cell phones and PDAs.

To center your work-life balance, it's important to figure out your priorities – what they really are, not what you think they should be. Ask yourself: if you could focus on only one thing in your life, what would it be? Once you've answered that question, identify the second thing; then the third, and so on. What would the order be for you? Would it be children, spouse, career, fitness and volunteerism? It's important to know how you rate the things in your life. Write them down to review when it seems your life has fallen out of balance.

Strategies for balance

Is working overtime an issue? Look at your list of priorities. If work is at the top of the list and overtime is mandatory, you may need to work the extra shift. If it's not, take a minute to think it over. Look at the positives and negatives to determine the best course of action. What's your level of fatigue? If you're so tired that you wouldn't be productive, perhaps you should decline. Assess what you may be missing to determine if you should put in overtime or not.

Are there activities you can drop? If there's something you're doing that isn't on your priority list, it may be time to let that activity go for now. You can also look at your work tasks this way. Is it possible to delegate any of them? Are you doing something that isn't part of your job, but that you've taken on to help someone else? Maybe you can split the task instead. Remember that your time is as important as theirs.

Are you managing your time effectively? Can you group errands together, to make one trip to the store instead of many? Do you do all your laundry in one day? Maybe it would be more time-effective to do a load every day.

Is it really important to make the bed? Decide what your cleaning standards are. Is one person doing more of the cleaning? Is it possible for everyone to chip in? Even a very young child can help put their toys away, if you make a game of it. Maybe you can afford to hire someone once a week, so you can spend your family time doing something other than cleaning the house.

Is someone offering to help? Take them up on it. Maybe your sister can watch the children so you can get a workout in. If you have other friends with kids, perhaps you can trade child care – you take their kids this Friday and they take yours next week.

Are you protecting your day off? Everyone needs some down time. Instead of waiting until the weekend, could you do laundry throughout the week, or grocery shop on the way home from work? This could help you get the time you need to relax and enjoy your family on the weekend.

Are you taking on things you don't want to do? If people at work ask you to help with projects that aren't part of your responsibilities, look at your priority list. Where does your career fall? If it's a low priority, think about your time and the nature of the project before you agree to help. If you do consent, the people you're helping may be able to reciprocate in the future.

Use a planner or calendar and schedule your personal time in the same manner as your work. Then you can be sure you're fitting in the down time and home time you need. Look at your priority list often, to remind you of the balance you're trying to achieve.

If you need additional help or someone to talk to, the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program can help. Call 545-0350 for information or an appointment.

Erin Doherty and MayoClinic.com provided relevant information that was incorporated into this article.



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