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## Get Back to the Basics to Find Balance in Life

Kate was overwhelmed.

“I’m dealing with a possible divorce,” she said, her voice cracking with stress. “My husband left me and is planning to move to Los Angeles. My kids have been sick all week.”

She told me how she had been trying to restart her nursing career, now that her children were a little older. “But I have to work at night in the emergency room to make ends meet,” she said. “I thought I had it all figured out. Then everything changed on me. It all sort of fell apart. I don’t know what to do.”

Sound familiar? It's a common problem. Life presents exciting possibilities, you go for the gold, and the next thing you know, you're up to your neck in troubles and stress.



We live in exciting times. Consider how different life is now than it was for our ancestors. Until the industrial revolution in the 1800s, life was structured by the rhythms of day and night and the changing seasons. Excitement, stimulation and change were all dangerous, to be avoided. To our ancestors, imbalance was a sign of danger.

Now contrast this with modern life. All our wondrous inventions - electricity, the automobile, the airplane, the telephone, the Internet - have stripped away the natural, external limits, boundaries and structure that had dictated life for our ancestors. Nowadays, you can do anything, anywhere, with anyone at any time. Life is filled with possibilities.

But this exciting, limitless life can leave you out of balance. Without the soothing structure that guided mankind over the ages, you can become driven by instinctive mental energy. When your nervous system senses that your life is out of balance, it cries out in alarm, as it was programmed to do by millions of years of evolution. You feel more and more stressed, uneasy and worried.

The answer to this problem is creating a framework to achieve balance in your life. Think of these seven rules of balance as operating rules for your brain - a guide to a healthy pattern of living:

### **1. Balance your time alone and time spent with people.**

Too much of our contact with other people is superficial and virtual - through television, the Internet, over cell phones, on crowded city streets, in shopping malls. Even though you may come into contact with dozens of people every day, in reality, you may be alone. Living without the calming structure of a relationship with a person you know and care about leads to depression, loneliness and frustration.

Balance the over stimulated loneliness of modern life by maintaining at least five close, supportive relationships. Use your natural style to build relationships. If you like music, use it to find people. If you're an athlete, build relationships through sports and activities. If you're an avid reader, build close relationships through a book club.

The antidote to today's superficial contact with people is to take time to build relationships based on who you are, and your unique interests and abilities.

## **2. Balance movement and rest.**

If you spend your day sitting - in a car, at a desk, in front of a computer, sitting on a couch watching TV or talking on the phone - you can't feel rested and relaxed. Instead, you'll feel a gradually rising sense of tension and restlessness. You need healthy movement to truly relax.

We were created to move. The purpose of resting is let us to gather our strength and energy to move again. If you think of the lives of our prehistoric ancestors, it makes sense. When our modern day nervous systems were being formed, you either moved - to find food, water and shelter or to escape danger - or you died. In prehistoric times, movement was life.

A regular program of movement - walking, working out at a gym, yoga, dance, tennis, gardening, etc. - will dissolve the restless tension that comes from a mentally stimulated but physically inactive state.

## **3. Balance living in the moment with thinking about the past.**

The timesaving tools available to us - automobiles, cell phones, the Internet, fax machines - are seductively efficient. They can draw you into a moment-to-moment, over stimulated and overwhelmed kind of existence. Before you know it, you can lose focus.

Keep your balance by staying focused on who you are - what you've been good at and why you chose to do what you do. You can help yourself by asking a friend for this kind of feedback. Are you doing things in ways that make sense for you? Are you sticking to your plans? Are you maximizing your skills and minimizing your risks and liabilities?

Get a sense of who you are; then keep a reminder of your skills, to orient you to the power of your own experience. Write down three to five activities that you're good at, that you rely on, and that help you to stay on track. Then, when the action starts to get fast and furious, review your skills to make sure you're doing what's right for you.

## **4. Balance your appetites with energetic abstinence, creative problem solving and planning.**

The natural human reaction to abundance is to consume. For our ancestors, this was adaptive, since times of abundance were rare. Appetites such as hunger, thirst and sex were signals from the brain that it was time to plan and take actions - to satisfy the appetite.

Nowadays, many of us live in a world of abundance. There are few periods of abstinence between periods of consumption - so we consume at will. Intuition tells us that the right thing to do when feeling a strong appetite is to consume. But intuition is wrong in this case. Physiologically, when feeling the stimulation of an appetite, the right thing to do is to plan an activity, carry out the activity and then to consume.

You maintain balance in the face of the abundance of modern life by using your mind to think, to plan and to take action instead of to simply consume. The next time you're hungry, give it a try. Go outside and

weed your garden instead of eating. Or visit a friend. Or go to church. Plan an activity and substitute it for eating or drinking. That's the path to balance.

### **5. Balance thinking and feeling.**

Your brain works best through a dynamic balance of thinking and feeling. Feeling, or emotion, is the energy of the mind. It powers action, memory and thought. When thinking is powered by feeling, your life has an elegant balance - it's meaningful and motivating and you know why you live the way you do.

Contrast this with our modern dilemma. Life has become mechanized, routine, repetitive and dull. Too little emotion and you can become flattened, demoralized and apathetic. Or, feeling bothered and harassed by the inhumanity of it all, you can lose your patience.

Restore your balance by learning to soothe the inevitable frustrations of living in a mechanized world. Take baths, get massages or sing in a choir. Anything that calms you will do. Then, find out what matters to you. The key is to look back at times in your life when you felt powerful, positive emotions. Remember what you were doing, what mattered to you then, and try to recreate those feelings in your everyday life.

### **6. Balance sleep and waking hours.**

Balancing sleep and wakefulness is critical. You need the right amount of sleep to refresh the energy and vitality of your body and mind.

It happened naturally in times past. Without electricity, people slept when it grew dark - in balance with the cycle of day and night, in cycle with the seasons. Now, in our 24/7 world, we're losing touch with the basic biologic need for sleep. Driven by the electronic excitement of the modern world, we're becoming a sleep-deprived society.

Balance sleep and wakefulness by finding out just how much sleep you need. Keep a chart to discover what amount of sleep feels best. Then get that amount of sleep. Train your sleep cycle by sticking to a regular time for waking; by getting lots of bright sunlight in the morning; by planning your activities so that you're most stimulated early in the day, and gradually calming and quieting yourself in the hours before sleep.

### **7. Balance belief and doubt.**

Every day, you're flooded with information, images and ideas that demand your attention. In our electronic, media-driven culture, every moment of life is dissected, analyzed and questioned. It becomes difficult to know what to do next. The result is worry.

Belief quiets this worried state of mind. Mankind has long used religious belief as an antidote to worry. Researchers have shown that belief in a positive outcome can help rid you of social anxiety, depression and panic attacks. And those who have firm beliefs generally have healthier, happier and more successful lives, research shows.

Balance the cynical worrying of modern life by following some practices that strengthen your ability to believe. Learn to talk positively to yourself and reflect on images of success. Pray if you are religious. Accept guidance. Learn to follow the wisdom of leaders. And follow reassuring ritual - whether it's going to church or reading stories to your children at bedtime. Ritual strengthens your belief by reminding you of the simple but powerful truths of life.

Follow the seven rules of balance and you'll find natural pathways within yourself to live a healthy and meaningful life. Apply these principles to truly enjoy the excitement, possibilities and passion of life.

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