

• BATYA L. LUDMAN

A colleague writes me at 6:45 a.m. that she is “already at work, and too tired to contemplate going on vacation tomorrow.” Up and also heading to work, I respond with one word, “Calgon.”

The makers of Calgon, a bath product advertised in the '70s, boasted that their product could take you away to a peaceful, tranquil place. Even if it was just in our mind and just for seconds, we embraced the Calgon message and wanted to leave behind our hectic lives and be transported to a calm, nurturing environment.

At times, we get so busy with work, family, community involvements and everything else that we need to do that we barely have time to look after ourselves, put meaning into our lives and do the things we really want to do.

Instead, as the flight attendant says, “put on your own oxygen mask first.” Achieving balance isn't easy, and for Israelis, not yet having the luxury of even an occasional Sunday off, we often find ourselves on autopilot during the week and on empty by the time the weekend arrives.

Can you lower your stress level, have quality time for what's important in your life and still feel good about all of your commitments? With a finite amount of time in any given day, month or year, how you organize your time enables you to manage it with greater success and feel like you have greater control over your life.

Take a moment and notice what your life is like. Be honest with yourself. Are you feeling good, or overwhelmed and stressed?

Before making plans to improve your life, first look at how you currently spend your time. Using percentages, make a pie chart. Now prioritize your goals and make the chart again, depicting what you would *like* your day to look like. Distinguish doing what you choose to do from what you feel you “should,” “have to” or “must” do. These later words are punitive and negatively charged. They won't leave you feeling good about yourself.

Do you feel you have balance in your life, or at least know what you'd like more of or less of? Do you feel invigorated, or emotionally drained, exhausted and on the verge of collapse? What would you like to achieve?

Here are a few thoughts to help kick-start the process.

1. Recognize that there is no such thing as a super-parent. You simply cannot do it all or be all things to everyone. If you assume that you can, something or someone will suffer.
2. Choose your priorities, knowing that you can't, and won't, make everyone happy. Work to accept your limits and let go of the guilt.
3. If you're already overwhelmed with work and family responsibilities, and you choose to add something, remind yourself that something else must go. Having taken on too much, you'll feel pressured and angry with yourself and others. The time has to come from somewhere, if you're trying to achieve balance.
4. If you find that you make promises that you can't keep, ask yourself if your expectations are unrealistic at this stage of your life. Are you overly perfectionist? Are you unable to be assertive – can you say “no” to things that you don't really want to do or can't take on?
5. It's easy to miscalculate your time, thinking you have more time than you do. If you attempt to cram too many things into the time allotted or misjudge how long things take, if you're consistently late, find yourself apologizing for not getting things done or feel like you need Rollerblades, you probably have time-management issues.

# Take me away

Do you barely have time to look after yourself, put meaning into your life and do the things you really want to?



ACHIEVING BALANCE in life isn't easy. (Chris Ware/TNS)

6. A good attitude is essential. Change your thinking and reframe “problems” into challenges. Live in the moment. Remind yourself that a successful day isn't necessarily measured by the quantity of the work accomplished but, rather, by the quality time spent with your loved ones.
7. Doing something for yourself may give you the emotional boost you need to accomplish more. Remember, your goal is to make time for what is important in your life. Your children will grow up and your time allocations will change, but you'll never get the time back for those things or people that you hold important. If you want to do something, now is the time.
8. Good time management requires using your time efficiently, being aware of how and when you waste it, commitment to goal setting and a viable plan. Productivity involves taking advantage of optimal times during the day to work – when it's quieter and you have fewer distractions, when you're more alert, and when you can schedule frequent breaks, change tasks and give yourself incentives and rewards.
9. Delegating also allows you to be more efficient. Even two-year-olds can help around the house.
10. The busier you are, the less you may look after yourself. You may grab junk food, make poor choices, neglect exercise, prioritize poorly and give up on what's important in an endeavor to get “things” done

on your never-ending “to do” list. Spontaneous “me time,” “date night” with your partner, and time out with friends is essential. Find time to relax and enjoy hobbies, chat with others, sleep well, look after your emotional well-being and put down technology and be truly present for yourself and others. Notice how you rate in these areas and remember that you are a role model.

The effort that you are willing put in to achieve your goals will help determine your success. Creating a more relaxed and calm atmosphere, feeling happier and being less exhausted, requires serious planning. Evaluate your successes and failures, making changes as necessary to enjoy a more balanced lifestyle.

We can't avoid stress in our lives. No matter how much we plan, the car will inevitably break down, a child will get sick and the project will take longer and cost more than you anticipate.

When life doesn't go as planned, remind yourself that this, too, will pass, focus on the things in your life that you can control, reassess your immediate priorities, remind yourself that tomorrow is another day, and don't take yourself too seriously.

In this way, you'll achieve real balance, for yourself and with those you love. That is really what life is all about. ■

*The writer is a licensed clinical psychologist (PsyD) in a private practice in Ra'anana, and author of the book Life's Journey: Exploring Relationships – Resolving Conflicts. ludman@netvision.net.il; www.drbatyaludman.com*