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# Is Work-Life Balance Part of Your New Year's Resolutions?

Posted by [Paul Barnwell](#) on Monday, 01/05/2015

By: Stacey Cabral-Levesque, guest blogger

Walking a tightrope is a balancing act for funambulists, but walking the tightrope of maintaining a reasonable workload is a balancing act for the rest of humanity, especially 21st century educators.

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After all, the demands don't ever seem to shrink for us educators. From grading papers and providing meaningful feedback, to data collection, to meetings, to evaluations and more meetings...you probably can commiserate.

According to the [National Commission on Teaching and America's Future](#), teacher attrition rate has grown by 50 percent over the past 15 years. The reasons vary, but it is often due to high stress, burnout, and a lack of reciprocated respect.

What needs to happen to retain quality educators? Clearly, quite a bit. Here's what has worked for me as I continue to strive to seek out the elusive state of work-life balance:

### **Prioritize**

Time must be made for family and friends. They are the ties that bind, and we need to maintain our personal connections.

Everyone is aware of the need to order things and have a "must do this first" stamped by date and deadline. But doing it is another story.

Earlier this fall, I experienced the challenge of prioritizing first hand. I started taking a class (something I've never done during the school year) and struggled to complete my homework and not have it hanging over my head. I decided to try and complete coursework immediately after class, and if that wasn't possible, chunk the homework it into doable amounts of time.

The only way to find that balance in life is to get it done. Make the list. Tackle major tasks first. Do the tasks that are least likely to get done by deadline because you don't enjoy doing them as much as something else. This has really worked for me.

### **Eliminate**

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Learn to limit and say no. You can't do it all, nor should you want to.

Determine one to two areas of passion and focus there. For me, it's mentoring new teachers and providing curriculum support. Don't say "yes" because you think it will help your career. Being on every committee and volunteering at every concert may just add to the stress and fatigue, and too many "yes" answers can lead to stretching yourself too thin.

Showing students I support their extracurricular activities outside of the classroom is important to me, but it could consume several weeknights and every Saturday every week. If a student invites me to a game or concert outside of school, I make it a point to go to at least one event in a month. If I am unable to go, I make it a point to ask them how it went, and I'm fine with this compromise.

## Release

Let some things go. Train and teach others to do (control freaks, unite!). Some things may never get done the way you want, and that will have to be okay.

I remember when I first started teaching and I thought every assignment needed to be checked, marked up and graded. I finally learned that homework could be out on desks, and as students completed the opener, I could walk around and check that it was completed.

And for longer assignments, rubrics with detailed feedback already embedded makes it easy enough to circle areas that need some work. I also learned to pick one area of English conventions to stress rather than mark up an entire essay in red.

When it comes to assignments, score only what is most

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INFORMED**

When it comes to assignments, score only what is most beneficial for students. Other work you assign can be for practice. When it comes to tests, I use “scored by” and allow peer grading. When it comes to homework, students place it on their desks and I check it as they work. The onus is on them and they take their responsibilities seriously.

Burnout happens and great teachers leave the profession because they miss out on living their lives. The work will always be there, so take some time to breath. Let the funambulists do their job and you do yours. Our jobs shouldn't feel as if we're teetering on the edge of falling, but it's up to us to set boundaries in order to thrive.

*What are your strategies for maintaining health, happiness, and energy in the face of so many demands?*

## 7 Comments

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**Tim** commented on January 6, 2015 at 6:12pm:

### Great Insight!

Only the discernment of a fine veteran educator could place the role of life and teaching (or any kind of work) into such a clear perspective. This article covers a lot of ground in a little time, and it makes me take a second look at how I handle things important in my life. Thank you!

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**Dave Orphal** commented on January 7, 2015 at 6:44am:

**Congrats!**

I saw a link to this post in SmartBriefs! Wat to go!

Great advice for teachers - the search for balance never ends!

**REPLY**



**Marc** commented on January 8, 2015 at 7:09pm:

**Loved it!**

While I may not be an educator, by trade, I believe all of us can gain some insight on better time management, from this article!! Very insightful and helpful. I especially loved your take in "Prioritize". This can easily be translated to many aspects of my day-to-day life.

**REPLY**



**Fawn** commented on January 9, 2015 at 4:22pm:

## Wow, lots to ponder and put into action here!

You have given some great insight and practical ideas for gaining "control" by letting go of some things! Learning to prioritize and to not feel responsible for every request that comes my way is great! That is what my focus is this year. Love this Stacey!

[REPLY](#)



**Susan Graham** commented on January 15, 2015 at 4:34pm:

## Making Room

Teachers leaders often feel the need to make a difference that they always step up to fill the gap and speak up every time teacher voice is needed.

Those teacher leaders often find it hard to gain traction in making change that they are hesitant to step back from the leadership roles they have taken on.

And teacher leaders rarely step away because they aren't quitters so they may follow through on professional commitments at the price of personal sacrifices.

But here is a lesson that I've learned from over the years..Stepping back creates a void and that's scary. But stepping back also creates some space for new growth in ourselves and new voices to be heard. Sometimes the greatest contribution is to identify and support a colleague who can replace us.

REPLY

**Tricia Ebner** commented on January 15, 2015  
at 9:28pm:

## **You are soooo right!**

Awesome blog, Stacey!

You are so right--that balance is so critical. I struggle the most, I think, with saying "no." Part of my challenge is that I'm having so much FUN doing so much both inside and outside my classroom. But over winter break, when I "should" have been working on a major unit for a class, I decided, CONSCIOUSLY, to set it all aside and focus on the family and friends, and it was such a refreshing, energizing break. (And somehow, the work is still getting done.) This time away from my teacher role allowed me to refocus on the true priority in life. In fact, when a last-minute, "Hey, let's go to the zoo with extended family" opportunity came up, I debated staying home to work on that unit, and decided to go. I am so very glad I did. Little did I know that our trip to the zoo would be the last time my son and I would see his grandmother (my mother-in-law). She was called home suddenly just a week ago. And since I'm on that serious note, I'll say, too, that my "rebalanced" approach made the events of the

past week easier to manage. Even though we had three snow days and it was end of semester, I was able to release some things, like my usual "hard and fast" rule on due dates, so that I could give myself the space and time to focus on family when we needed that most. Balance is definitely necessary in this amazing profession, and it's something we need to help our youngest members cultivate, and we more veteran teachers need to carefully guard and model, for our own benefit as well as that next generation of teachers.

[REPLY](#)



**Fatima Khan** commented on January 20, 2015 at 11:23pm:

### **Facts which can't be avoided**

Quite interestingly true as we all teacher mostly stuck in a situation where we could not find a way. If we start prioritizing the things, we could make best out of worst.

[REPLY](#)

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