

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Creating an Action Plan to Achieve Balance

Many of us are juggling so many different responsibilities that the slightest hiccup can be sufficient to throw our lives out of balance—and major problems can simply mean disaster.

If we want to regain control and achieve genuine long-term balance, we need more than quick-fix solutions. It's time to look at the root of the imbalance and come up with a big picture action plan—one that will help us meet work, family and leisure priorities and still have time and stamina for the curves life throws our way. Interested? Then today's the time to start.

Tips and Tools You Can Use

Identification of priorities is one of the key steps in your action plan. Recognize that your priorities won't necessarily be the same as everyone else's and will also tend to change as you move through life. Here are some tips to get you going:

List current priorities.

- List the three or four top priorities in your life. Then separately add a list of four or five important but lesser priorities.
- Think carefully about core priorities. For example, instead of listing "Job", reflect whether your priority is to earn a living or to build a career.
- Add any priorities your partner holds that you haven't included.

Make a Wish List of priorities.

- Make a separate list of priorities or goals that your current life doesn't allow for e.g., learning new skills, volunteer work, enjoying nature with your children, spending time with friends, etc.
- Add to this separate list any lifestyle changes that you wish you could make e.g., giving up work, moving to the country or town, starting your own business, etc.
- If this list has more than three or four priorities that aren't possible in your current life, consider whether a lifestyle change is in order. A new job? Part-time hours? A move?

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Reduce non-priorities.

- Keep a log for a few days, showing where your time is spent. Be detailed—include time spent chatting at the cooler or on the phone. Include time in the car or watching TV.
- Highlight the time that is devoted to priorities.
- List the time that is going to non-priorities. Consider what could be eliminated. Be ruthless—say goodbye to the school fair or after-work drinks if they don't relate to your priorities.
- When asked whether you will do something for friends, neighbors or schools, consider whether the request fits your priorities. If not, say "No".
- Consider if "non-priority" time could be used for "Wish List" priorities e.g. Instead of lining up at the deli for lunch or chatting in the canteen, could you brown-bag it and go to a fitness club/ practice yoga/read a book at your desk/jog around the block with a friend/feed the ducks in the park?

Delegate non-priorities.

- Problem-solve with family members—could children shovel the snow or collect dry cleaning? Could a cousin check in on an older relative?
- Are there neighboring students who would appreciate extra pocket money for running errands, mowing the lawn, cleaning windows, walking the dog?
- Could you use commercial services like grocery delivery or dry cleaning pick-up?
- Highlight all non-priorities on your list that could be delegated.
- Review whether the time you save could be used for "Wish List" priorities.

Organize a daily To Do list around priorities.

- Highlight top priorities on your list in one color. Do these things first.
- Highlight secondary priorities in another color. Aim to do these things next.
- Highlight non-priorities in a third color. If you get these things done or can delegate them, great. If not, don't fret—they're not essential.

Set longer-term goals.

To be successful, make your goals specific, measureable, attainable, realistic and timely. You will then have a roadmap to get to where you want to be. Follow these guidelines and you will be well on your way to success.

- Keep your "Wish List" of priorities in your day planner.
- Regularly review it to see whether your schedule can include them.
- Resolve to add at least one or two Wish List priorities to your life this year.
- If your Wish List requires major lifestyle changes, begin moving towards your goal.