

Women, Find Your Balance

I think I would have made a fantastic roaming reporter. I love to talk with people (friends and strangers) about where they are in life, how they got there and what's next for them – sometimes to the chagrin of my family. I particularly enjoy talking with women about the choices they have made when it comes to finding balance in their lives. Being a mother of young children, I used to think that balance was an issue exclusive to my circumstances. I've come to know that all women face this challenge whether it's balancing work, kids, fitness, time with spouse, caring for aging parents, time for self, community activities, etc.

It seems that every woman I know and those that come into my life for only a brief time have found a different way to achieve their own balance. This has led me to the conclusion that there is no one right way to construct a balanced life – but there is at least one way that will work for you right now. In the hopes of helping you to find a better balance in your life, I'd like to share the following advice that has been meaningful in my own quest.

- ✧ Be where you are. My Dad has always counselled me and many others that your ship can usually only be in one port at one time. Multi-tasking is generally a positive ability to possess however there are times when putting 100% of your attention into a single activity is much more effective. Unify your heart, mind and body and be completely present in the moment you are in.
- ✧ Play 30 minutes everyday. A very good friend shared this jewel of advice with me and for us, it applies to our kids. How many times do requests to play or engage in something fun get met with “in a sec” or “when I'm done”? Set the timer on the stove, clear your mind and indulge in 30 minutes of play. The gift of this time to your kids or yourself will reap many rewards.
- ✧ You can have it all, just not at the same time. Whether your goal is to conquer the business world, care for another human being or begin an initiative that will better our planet, your choice to invest time in that particular endeavour will mean that you are sacrificing it elsewhere. Most likely your life does not have a single focus and therefore it is impossible to say you are devoting 100% of your energy to any one thing. How would your life change if you could say to yourself “that's good enough”?
- ✧ Know your values. What's important to you? If you could not speak, would your actions communicate what you hold dear? If I looked at your calendar could I tell what feeds your spirit? At the end of your life, what will your legacy be? Only you can decide what is of value to you and only you can choose to live accordingly.

- ✧ Balance is not a static equation. This is a personal learning of mine. Just when I think I've got a perfect routine, something happens that throws a wrench in the system. It could be as small as the baby learning to crawl (which means far less work can be done in his presence) or something larger like taking on a new work project, readjustments have to be made to keep life in sync.
- ✧ Build a support system. Back up care for children or elders, contingency plans for travel are just a couple of examples of supports that can help preserve your balance. It's also important to have a personal support circle of friends and/or family that can share in your triumphs and offer advice and encouragement during the tough times. Please note that not all of the people in your life may be equipped to be part of your circle – identify who is best suited to be in your corner in certain circumstances.
- ✧ Balance can be measured in a day, a week or a year. You may be able to carve your day into slots that allow you to devote time to all of the priorities in your life. Others may find that balance comes within the span of a week. Even more of you may find your balance within a year. I have many close friends who are teachers. Ten months of the year they work long hours for their students and look forward to the holiday breaks and summer vacation to spend time with family and friends. Just take care to not put off time that cannot be retrieved – children are only young once and grandparents aren't with us forever.
- ✧ Give yourself permission. Guess what? You're not perfect (and neither am I). Honour your values and the people you care about and you will have the product of your best efforts. Give yourself the grace and love you deserve. People only respect those who respect themselves. What kind of role model are you being? Are you demonstrating that a balanced life is possible? Are you showing those who look up to you that you deserve time for self-care and self-nurture? Are you a servant or a slave to others?

I do think it is a wonderful time to be a woman in search of balance. Despite the increased demands on our time, we have so many options when it comes to managing our work, home and family. Flextime, technology, sabbaticals, outsourcing, having kids later in life are all trends that can work to our advantage. I encourage you to abandon the expectations that others may have for your life and create your own roles at home and work to which you truly aspire. Like so many things in life, the benefits far outweigh the investment.

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