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The art of balancing priorities between home and work

HUMAN ENERGY is like any other commodity: there's a limited supply. And the question of where you spend your daily supply influences how you manage priorities between home and work.

Some of us get caught in a cycle in which at some level (conscious or unconscious) our identity and sense of worth are interconnected and defined by our work. The result is our work takes the majority of energy and we have little left over for other elements of our life, such as family and community.

In essence, our work formulates our ego and sense of worth. For others, work is nothing more than a means to an end (e.g., pay bills to live). Those persons may or may not have outside passions and interests.

I have seen many clients for whom the root cause of their psychosocial issues, such as overcompensating for stress by overeating and drinking, was an inability to balance priorities at home and work. As a result, they lost relationships, health or self-esteem.

The sad truth is that only a select few business leaders have figured out how to balance the priorities of home and work. They know how to prioritize energy so there is enough to ensure work is meaningful and personally fulfilling and to be engaged and committed to home priorities that provide another set of rewards — family, community and self.

So how are you prioritizing home and work? Are you spending your energy wisely? In my role as a business coach, asking leaders these two questions often opens up some deep and thoughtful conversations.

Here are some actions to help balance your priorities:

Observe your learned patterns: The first step is to keep a simple log for the next week of what you are doing both at work and at home, to track the daily patterns of where you are spending your energy. Track your hours at work and at home with enough detail that if you were to hand your logbook to someone else they would have a clear picture of what you are and are not doing. It's important not to judge or try to correct what you're doing; just be a witness and write down where you are spending your energy.

Decision time: Take 60 minutes and go through your one-week log and read it closely. Ask yourself: If you were to run this movie for the rest of your career, would it have a happy ending?

Do you see the potential for regrets?

Are you rationalizing? My wife sent me a Charlie Brown cartoon that reminded me that at the end of our lives what people will remember about us is not what kind of work we did or our income, but how much we cared. Many of us get on a train ride and don't pay attention



to where we're going. Logging your activity will help you decide whether you are happy with the train ride you're on and whether it will get you where you really want to go.

Realign energy: We can switch our priorities, but to do so we need to also shift our energy. Many leaders are able to realign their energy by simply taking time to exercise, diet, rest and relax. The result is they develop an increased capacity and have more energy to balance priorities of home and work. One can't realign energy without a clearly defined priority plan involving expectations for home and work. Once you have this plan you will see the gap between where you want to be and where you are.

Then you can take one step at a time to close the gap. Change may be slow, but it will be constant if you take the actions. Waiting for tomorrow to start is one option, but so is now.

