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November 12, 2025

Maintaining a Healthy Work/Personal Life Separation

Is there such a thing as work/life balance?

The answer to this question is as varied as each of our jobs and personal lives and can change depending on where you are in your career and on the timing of life events.

The term “balance” often conjures a visual of a scale allocating equal distribution of time to both work and personal life. The reality, however, is that these opposing forces can teeter towards one direction or the other. And, for many of our members, it can often be weighted to the work side. Understandable, as the privilege and responsibility of school leadership requires a significant commitment of time and effort.

When I worked as a consultant enhancing employee engagement within large organizations, the term used in engagement surveys was “work/life blending”, which was likely more accurate than “balance”. However, I felt this language suggested an overlap, or a state of continual co-occurrence. Instead, with my clients, I referred to this concept as work/life “quality”. And while there may be overlaps in our work and life demands, it is often the *intentional* separation that is conducive to a better quality of life and well-being.

An Unhealthy Work/Life Quality

You may be experiencing an unhealthy work/life quality when work takes precedence over your personal life, potentially leading to a cycle of stress, disconnection, and exhaustion. Signs can include:

- **Constant overwork:** You regularly work long hours, including weekends and holidays, without sufficient time for rest or relaxation. Research shows that working long hours is linked to a decline in physical health, and can result in a higher risk of stroke, anxiety, and depression.
- **A struggle with personal responsibilities:** Everyday tasks like laundry, dishes, and scheduling appointments begin to fall through the cracks.
- **A struggle to disconnect from work:** Whether it is after hours or on a rare day off, your mind stays tethered to your inbox, to-do lists, or the next deadline.
- **Strained relationships:** Your relationships, inside and outside of work, begin to suffer. You may be easily irritated and distant with loved ones and co-workers.
- **Questioning your path:** You can't imagine doing what you do for the rest of your life. Even if you are working somewhere you once loved, it no longer brings joy.
- **Feeling overextended:** You feel like no matter what you are doing, you should be doing something else. When you are with friends, family, or simply doing an activity you usually enjoy, ask yourself, "am I here, enjoying the moment?" If not, you need to explore the changes that need to occur for you to answer "yes" to that question.

A Healthy Separation

Maintaining a healthy separation between work and personal life is important for your well-being. It involves setting clear boundaries, managing time effectively, and prioritizing both professional and personal needs. This can help reduce stress, prevent burnout, and foster a more fulfilling life overall.

Here are some tips to consider:

1. Establish Clear Boundaries

- **Define Work Hours:**

While the working day and hours of an educational leader are hard to define, you can still communicate and set expectations around your online availability. You do not have to respond to every message. Try turning off notifications during personal time to avoid distractions and interruptions. Set specific tones only for priority individuals, such as your family... and your superintendent! Model this behaviour and intentional separation by communicating to staff, and even parents, within established hours and days.

- **Communicate Boundaries:**

Clearly communicate your availability and boundaries, both at work and at home.

2. Time Management and Prioritization:

This is a critical skill for being successful at work and bringing quality back into your personal life.

- **Schedule Effectively:**

Use tools like calendars and to-do lists to organize your tasks within your defined work hours. Have all your dates, priorities, appointments, and schedules in one place, rather than scattered across different apps or sketched on Post-It notes. Whatever your system – from Outlook to old fashioned paper day timers – have everything in one place.

Intentionally schedule “blank space” in your calendar. Prioritize time in your workday for activities that are goal-oriented such as focussing on planning, strategy, or tasks that are engaging and enlightening for you. Schedule time to visit classrooms. Honour this space like any other appointment. If it needs to be moved, reschedule the blank space somewhere else in your calendar.

- **Take Similar Steps in your Personal Life:**

Learn more about these valuable time management tips with Peter Johnston, BCPVPA Director of Professional Learning and Development, through three online sessions in early 2026: The 5 Choices to Extraordinary Productivity® – [check it out here!](#)

- **Prioritize Tasks:**

Focus on the “Necessity” tasks (crises, emergency meetings, last-minute deadlines) and those tasks that provide “Extraordinary Productivity” (proactive work, high-impact goals, creative thinking, planning). Try to identify and minimize those things that are distractions, and not central to your work.

This is another valuable concept that is discussed in depth in the **5 Choices** course noted above.

- **Take Breaks:**

Regular breaks during the workday are essential for maintaining focus and preventing burnout. Check out this ReFresh column on ["A 90 Second Sound Escape"](#)

3. Prioritize Personal Well-being:

- **Set Intentional Targets to Enhance your Well-being**

Set goals for your personal well-being, whether it is a specific improvement to healthy behaviours or prioritizing activities, hobbies, or personal passions that bring you joy. If you are not intentional in defining what this looks like, and are not committed to "making it happen", it will remain in your mind under the heading, "I wish I had time for that".

Check out this short, but impactful ReFresh column, ["Canary in a Coal Mine"](#). It shares steps to help you to monitor your separation of work and life by prioritizing personal needs.

- **Prioritize Sleep:**

Ensure you are getting enough sleep to maintain energy levels and mental clarity.

- **Practice Relaxation Techniques:**

Incorporate relaxation techniques like meditation or mindfulness into your routine to manage stress. Check out these ReFresh columns: ["Take 5"](#) and [Take 10 and Escape](#).

- **Stay Active:**

Engage in regular physical activity to improve both physical and mental health.

4. Foster a Healthy Work Environment:

- **Reach Out:**

If you are struggling with work/life quality, reach out to an experienced and trusted colleague or mentor to explore how they set priorities, and maintain work life quality. Reach out to the BCPVPA, as we can also support members with resources, coaching, and strategies to help you consider how to allocate your time and effort to enhance both work and life quality.

- **Lead by Example:**

Encourage your colleagues to prioritize work/life quality by demonstrating and modeling healthy boundaries.

In Conclusion

By being specific and intentional when implementing these strategies, you may feel more in control of your work flow, and more mindful of the signs of stress and disconnection. That can be a healthy foundation in your pursuit of an enhanced work/life quality, with the objective of increased happiness, productivity, and overall well-being.

Sources

<https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-have-good-work-life-balance>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.