

ms. voice

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Culinary kings complete their dining experiences to raise funds for the MS Society *Regional Voice page 6*

HOW TO BE SUCCESSFULLY

working-living-balancing

by Charlotte Hinksman

Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) is a therapy which uses the brain's natural processes to make changes in the way we think, feel and behave. This article will look at how to be living your life in a continuously balanced way to get the maximum health and wellbeing benefits.

How do you know when

you are in balance?

Having had the benefit of contrast recently (i.e. being significantly out of balance and then putting myself back in it again) I can answer this question wisely:

- 1 You feel physically well, or as well as you can feel, you feel rested when you rise in the morning, you have time for things - yes, time - for activities and people you really enjoy.
- 2 Your lifestyle allows you to take regular exercise that

works for you, and on what you eat and how you eat it.

- 3 You feel alert and energised when you are going about your daily "work" - referring to anything from paid employment, voluntary employment and/or looking after your home and family.

- 4 Affairs are organised and up to date and you have a sense of being able to manage what is required of you and what you are committed to.

- 5 You are comfortable at the pace your life is moving forward.

- 6 When you are at rest, relaxation and play, you are 100% focussed on this, switched off from your work. When you are going about your work, you are 100% focussed on this. You are therefore happy at work and happy at rest.

- 7 You have surplus energy available for what is required and what you choose to do in your life and a feeling of wellbeing.

How idyllic does this sound? How reachable and achievable does it feel from where you are at the moment? Does it seem unachievable and unreachable? This will give you some idea where you are at right now. Speaking from careful personal and professional experimentation, observation and consultation over the last





Above: Charlotte Hinksman is a certified master practitioner and life coach of NLP.

five years, I can safely say it is absolutely possible for anyone to get themselves there: it simply takes awareness and continuous adjusting based on you knowing yourself well and it is easier than you think. It involves paying very close attention to what is going on in your life, how you feel - physically, mentally and emotionally - and the ability to make adjustments at any given moment to put yourself back into a balance: a feeling that is now defined and familiar. People are operating under the illusion that "work-life

balance" is destination or a goal that you will reach one day - this is a misunderstanding. When you jump on a bike and start peddling, you are achieving balance, the ability to keep yourself upright and moving forward. If you stop peddling you end up wobbling and landing in a ditch somewhere! It becomes balancing therefore: continuous paying attention to where you are and adjusting yourself to stay balanced. Sometimes you cruise downhill, and sometimes

it takes effort to get uphill, yet your feet stay on the peddles. Working-living-balancing is therefore a continuous process - not a destination - it is something you are doing, through awareness and adjusting, now, and for the rest of your life.

How do you know when you are not in balance?

The answer to this question is something I would like YOU to get better at answering for yourself - as doing this balancing business

successfully is going to take self-awareness. Some generalisations of signs and symptoms can include:

- If you are a woman - hairy legs (this is the answer I get most often in workshops when I ask this question!) - a sign of neglecting those things which make you feel good, or neglecting the simple things because you simply "don't have time"
- Feeling overcommitted or overloaded by the tasks required of you and therefore unable to meet these commitments or meeting them under a considerable amount of stress
- Physical and emotional symptoms of stress and / or fear and anxiety (see previous article on the mind-body connection). Includes losing sleep, poor digestion, mind busy with invasive thoughts, unable to relax properly, illness and/or physical symptoms showing

up in the body

- To do list too long and unable to complete the essential things
- Feeling overwhelmed and feeling like you simply "don't have time" or "how am I ever going to get this done?"
- A feeling of hastiness in the chest, or rushing when going about tasks - just wanting to get on to the next thing...
- Serving everyone else, with little or no downtime for yourself - leading to resentment of others
- Not making enough time to pay attention to your diet and not making enough time to do the exercise you know works for you
- You never get to do the things that you want to do, the things you enjoy
- Not focussed in the present moment - when you are resting you are thinking of work, or when you are working you are longing for rest or play
- Going about your daily tasks but feeling unfulfilled or dissatisfied, as if something is missing
If these signs continue

long-term you are at risk of burn out and the long term physical and mental effects of prolonged stress - both of which are major and can cause serious issues.

What stops us from paying attention and adjusting appropriately?

When we are overloaded or there is "not enough time in the day", or we are stressed and therefore tired, we neglect those good balancing behaviours that make us feel good; like shaving, taking a walk, spending time with our animals, exercising, eating the things that are right for our body. We instead get into short-term stress relief patterns like watching TV, eating bad food, drinking more alcohol, smoking more cigarettes. Short term of course, this might be fine i.e. you get a big project out of the way and then you put things back to balance once time returns to you. However, sometimes these short-term stress relief habits become difficult to change and therefore problematic in themselves.

Many work places are still operating under the illusion that stress and working under continued pressure is good motivation for people



- and it can be - if only short-term. The problem is that once one big deadline is out of the way, the next one comes along and we continue on this pattern of short-term stress relief. It is well documented by research now that when people are well rested, relaxed, balanced and happy they perform significantly better at work. This is our aim.

Then, of course, the excuses we have found for not giving ourselves permission to do those things that feel good:

■ We feel guilty if we are doing something for ourselves ("I can't go for a walk when I should be doing the washing...")

■ We put others before ourselves ("If I don't call Anne, she will be annoyed")

■ Unable to say no to people - usually because of fear they will be upset with us or dislike us

■ Making decisions about how we spend our time that consider other's needs above our own

■ Not taking responsibility for taking adequate breaks during and after work

■ Believing that you just "don't have time"
Thus the vicious cycle continues.

What can you start doing, instead, now and in any given moment?

This is about YOU getting to know YOU. You must create awareness about:

What are your earliest signs that you are out of balance? What are your main stressors or triggers for stress in your life? What are your personal dysfunctional patterns - do you find it hard to say no? Do you over-commit, take on more than you are capable of? Are you good at ignoring what your body is telling you?

Do you know the stuff that balances you out and makes you feel better, or even better, the stuff that makes you feel great? Are you an Active Relaxer (you need to be doing an activity in order to relax, like knitting, playing chess, gardening or exercising)? Or are you a Passive Relaxer (you need to be doing nothing in order to relax, lying down, watching a movie, having a bath)? What, or who, drains your energy and what gives you energy?

Exercises that work for working-living-balancing:

1 Buy an A3 pad of paper, or a big notebook, you will need one.

2 Catch your earliest warning signs: write a list of how you know you are stressed or out of balance (this is different for everyone). It is good to do this when you are actually in the moment - so you are aware and can notice your earliest warning signs. Mine are a feeling of hastiness in the chest and finding it hard to relax my thoughts before bed. As soon as I get the slightest hint of either one of those signs I jump on it like a dog with a bone and am on to the next exercise.....

3 Your Energy Bucket
Write down all the things you can do



that you know energise you or replace your energy. For example: 8 hours sleep, yoga, planting the garden, salsa dancing, time with my grandchildren, reading, good conversations with friends...and so on. Write each one with a big arrow going IN to your Energy Bucket.

Write down all the things that you know drain your energy. For example: not disconnecting from work, not taking breaks, draining conversations, working long hours, too little sleep, school meetings, washing...and so on. Write each one down the bottom of the bucket as a HOLE in your bucket, with

an arrow coming OUT for your Energy Bucket. Now that you can see it all, what are the HOLES you can PLUG UP? You don't have to plug them up forever, they can be short-term plugs! And some of them you may "semi-plug" - i.e. do less of. And how can you do MORE of what needs putting in? This will help decide what you put your time into and what needs adjusting at that given moment in time. You will come here again and again as you continuously adjust in response to your awareness to be balancing your life.

I am still working out my spiritual beliefs - and, there

is one thing I am certain of - you are not on this planet to "get it all done" at the cost of your health and wellbeing. Remember, your life doesn't exist without YOU, so look out for you, you are important.

About Charlotte

Charlotte Hinksman is a certified master practitioner and life coach of NLP. She has a private practice in central Wellington and also conducts sessions over SKYPE. More information can be found at: www.charlottehinksman.com, chinksman.blogspot.com or at www.nzanlp.org.nz.

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Yes, you can.