Make balance a priority!

Linda got a call saying that her father was going into the hospital near his home on the other side of the state. She would need to travel there and quickly arrange care for her two dogs while away. She also wanted to investigate some senior health and convenience services that her dad might need upon discharge from the hospital. There wasn’t time for that now, though. Life got complicated in a hurry.

It is common for people to try to pull off a long list of tasks each day. But when unexpected duties or events complicate your already lengthy to-do list, it is easy to feel like you managed only to wear yourself out by the end of the day.

Life is busy and if you are finding little time for you in the daily routine, maybe it is time to put balance high on your to-do list from now on.

Fortunately, there are some steps you can take to get your work and life in better balance. One way is to stop and consider each of your activities during a typical day and then honestly assess if they are valuable or not. Identifying your priorities in life can help you separate the necessary from the expendable.

With a little thought and planning, you can:

- Learn to set limits in your work and personal life so you do not get pulled in so many directions
- Establish goals that are realistic and achievable
- Focus more on your priorities and less on non-productive distractions

Linda called to talk with a ParTNers EAP consultant. She was able to outline the services her dad may need in the near future. Linda also asked about pet care services, which might be needed for up to two weeks. The consultant came up with qualified senior care and pet sitting options—both in-home and facility-based—from which Linda could choose. This saved her considerable time and trouble.

Tips for getting more done

Getting more done seems like an obvious goal but taking on too much at the wrong time can actually lower your productivity. Instead of becoming overwhelmed by multi-tasking or swept away by too many commitments, strategize how you might approach a long job-list:

**Timing is everything.** Are you an “early bird” or a “night owl”? Whenever you can, take advantage of your prime time to do the important and difficult tasks.

**Prevent problems.** Be sure to fill prescriptions, return phone calls, and pay your bills on time. Take care of problems when they first start so they don’t become worse.

**Protect your time.** Learn to say, “no.” When you become too involved and “spread yourself too thin,” you do not have time to do the things you really need to do in a high quality way.

**Avoid procrastination.** If you have an unpleasant task, do it first and get it out of the way. Give yourself a reward for accomplishing it.

**Simplify when possible.** Remember that there is often a better way to do things. Look at ways to make tasks quicker, easier, simpler, and less tiring.
Establishing realistic goals

Sometimes people set goals that are not realistic given their circumstances. It is better to establish reasonable targets that you are likely to reach within a set time. ParTNers EAP can help with creating and setting goals. Call us at 1-855-437-3486 or visit www.Here4TN.com.

- **Take a big-picture look at yourself.** Try reflecting on what you would like to accomplish in six months, one year, five years or ten. A good goal is one you really care about—not one you think would meet the approval of others.

- **A realistic goal is a SMART goal.** Although there are variations on the words comprising this acronym, the useful SMART goal setting process generally means that your goals are: 1) **S**pecific, 2) **M**easurable, 3) **A**ttainable, 4) **R**ealistic, and 5) **T**ime-based. Realistic goals are those that are not so lofty that you are likely to give up on them, or so easy that they will not require you to stretch a little.

- **Start with a single goal.** Setting multiple goals at once, such as losing 40 pounds, getting a Ph.D. and learning conversational French, can be overwhelming. Do not insist that you change too many aspects of your life simultaneously.

- **Write down your goal and plan.** Thinking about but not documenting a goal can cause it to slip away. Instead, write down your goal and your action plan to achieve it. (An action plan includes all of the activities needed to attain your goal by a specific date.) This will give you something concrete to review. It can help keep you on track when you need a reminder.

- **Identify potential obstacles.** There are always some stumbling blocks on the path to reaching a goal. Listing some of these at the outset will give you time to find solutions for overcoming them.

- **Set short-term milestones.** Write down interim goals on the way to achieving your larger aims. For example, instead of planning to run a marathon, strive to complete a 5K event by the end of this year. Smaller, realistic goals provide more opportunities for achievement to keep you going.

- **Track your progress and reward yourself.** Mark even your smallest progress toward your goals. Take pride in your efforts!

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**Protect your valuable time by setting limits**

If you are not comfortable setting limits on the time you give to others, saying no can be difficult. However, establishing boundaries can help you save more personal and family time. Some tips:

- **Identify your priorities.** Think about the things that are most important to you. Consider writing them down and posting it where you will regularly see it. Avoid activities that do not fit.

- **Don’t over-commit.** Sometimes it is necessary to say no to requests so you can maintain your balance. It is fine to say “no” in a gracious way. An example: “I would like to help, but given my current commitments, I do not think I could give it 100 percent.”

- **Ask if it can wait.** Supervisors and customers often want work to be completed “yesterday.” However, when appropriate, tactfully asking if you can turn it in tomorrow may help you head for home at a more reasonable hour.

- **Establish off times.** Try setting a certain block of hours each night or on weekends during which you will not answer texts, emails or phone calls. Be fully present with your family and friends.
Get the most out of your day

If you find that your days sometimes get away from you, and you feel you have not accomplished much despite a packed schedule, here are some ways to regain control.

**Morning planning is key.** Take a few quiet minutes in the morning to plan and prioritize the tasks of your upcoming day.

**Tackle priorities first.** Whether they are enjoyable or not, start on your most important tasks first.

**Recognize your most productive times.** People have different levels of energy and creativity at different times of the day. Know your “prime times.” When possible, do creatively challenging tasks then.

**Stay focused in the moment.** Even though there may be many tasks competing for your attention during the day, stay focused on doing what’s most important now.

**Minimize distractions.** We all have things that distract us and eat up productive time. Limit your texting, Web surfing, personal calls, and social media activity only to brief, set periods each day.

**Do something for you.** Despite the daily chaos, try to carve out at least a little time for your favorite hobby or other soul-nurturing activity.

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Your ParTNers EAP can help you find balance

Balancing your life can be a challenge. Family, work, finances, health, home, car problems and many other issues often conflict. These can keep you from getting to things you wanted to accomplish today.

ParTNers EAP, a key part of your benefits, can help you balance your busy work schedule and personal life.

You have access to a suite of helpful tools and resources including an EAP counselor that can provide addition information about achieving a work-life balance. Simply visit www.Here4TN.com and get started today.

**Your ParTNers EAP counselors can provide personal assistance to you every step of the way!**

Services can include:
- Prenatal care,
- Adoption,
- Infant and child care,
- Education resources,
- Retirement planning,
- Senior care,
- Relocation, and
- Daily living needs such as pet care, auto services, home improvement, etc.

Legal and financial counseling, plus the member discount center, is also available.

Just call 1-855-Here4TN (437-3486) toll-free or go to www.Here4TN.com.