

Wellness and Burnout Prevention Committee

Work-Life Balance and the Search for Bigfoot

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There is a ton of internet chatter in regard to work-life balance. In fact, a simple Google search of “work-life balance” reveals 98,600,000 results in 1.19 seconds. With all the resources available, why do we still struggle to find work-life balance? For the same reason we struggle to find Bigfoot (whose Google search revealed 130,000,000 in 0.74 seconds), it does not exist. The very term “work-life balance” implies that work is not part of our lives; as if, work is a separate entity from our lives. This idea is preposterous. When we enter the work place, we do not spontaneously morph into a separate being just as the reverse does not occur when leaving the work place to head home.

To further explain my point, let’s look at my household first-aid kit. As a mother of two young boys, our first-aid kit is equipped with Dermabond®, a suture kit along with suture and lidocaine, a pediatric laryngoscope with a set of Magill’s forceps, and then the normal first-aid accouterment such as bandages, tweezers, and antibiotic ointments. As an already paranoid human, being an EM physician adds another layer of paranoia based on what I see at work every day. This comes home.

Another example is how I interact with parents or gravid females who present to the ED with various concerns and complaints. The fact that I carried two children and am now raising them gives me an increased “street cred” when I treat these patients. Because I am able to sit down and share personal experiences with these patients, they find more confidence and comfort in the medical advice I offer. Work and life are not separate.

One major key in finding balance is to first remove the term work-life balance from our lexicon and replace it with life balance. Next we must do a personal

inventory about what makes us happy and unhappy at work and at home. I have found that after working three to four days in a row, I am done with all things work related. When I attempt to push past that, I am not happy and decompensate. The same goes for home life. On day one of being at home with the kids, I am thrilled to cook for and craft with my family. Beyond day four at home, I am begging to get back to work. Since this revelation, I am a much happier person in general and feel balanced.

The next step in finding life balance is to balance what we put out with what we take in. By this I mean, we can only give so much to others until our personal giving tanks are empty and we decompensate. We chose a profession in which the giving often exceeds the receiving. We must do another self-assessment to evaluate what we can do to maintain our generosity. I approached this by simply writing a list of all things I find relaxing and replenishing. My list includes items such as sleep, exercise, and healthy eating. Sometimes one or two items on my list may take a hit and I can feel it physically and mentally. Every Saturday, I sit down with my husband to analyze the upcoming week and work in two hours a week where I can get in some form of exercise whether that be a spin class, yoga or Pilates. That’s literally two hours of time dedicated to myself out of 168 possible hours.

The journey to finding life balance is not an easy road. It is laden with some obstacles and one should expect a few fails. Do not be discouraged by these. With practice and time, we can all become masters of finding balance and share our personal victories with one another. Good luck. I am looking forward to seeing you on the path with me. ●

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