

It Ain't Brain Surgery! Get some perspective.

Several years ago, a brain surgeon wrote about the stresses of his work. The headline read: "It IS brain surgery!" He discussed how you handle work pressures when you cannot say, "Well, it isn't brain surgery."

This came to mind recently on hearing several lawyers talk about their work and their concerns about achieving a balance between family life and professional obligations.

One senior lawyer said she treated legal work as if its consequences were as important as those of brain surgery—life or death. I felt humble, but then became concerned that her attitude would lead to trouble in the long run.

Perspective

One of the tools for achieving a work/life balance is perspective. If you consider your obligations in every step of every legal matter to be of life and death importance, you have lost perspective. The same is true when you lose perspective on your personal or family obligations.

What personal obligations are at issue? Well, there are: paying your bills on time, filing your income taxes when due, fulfilling commitments to friends. Balance requires that you commit to yourself that you will make time each week for play, exercise, creativity, rest and recuperation, and reflection. All these things balance your life and develop your perspective and your positive spirit and optimism.

Balancing obligations

As we seek to give each its aspect of our lives its due, our professional responsibilities and our family duties have to be measured. A criminal lawyer recently spoke of her anger that a client would spend an extra month in jail awaiting trial in order that the other defense counsel could have the whole day off for her daughter's birthday.

Another was somewhat uncomfortable about canceling client meetings so that she could take her child, with an emerging fever, to the doctor

instead of allowing her ex-husband or childcare attendant to do it. She did not trust that they would communicate the problem to the doctor or the solution to herself adequately. That makes me think, “Well, it’s not rocket science.”

You have to develop perspective. There are going to be some legal steps that have very grave consequences if mishandled or neglected. Many others would not. Some childcare responsibilities ought not to be delegated while others ought to be. There are some joys of parenthood we do not want to miss and others we have bargained away by making other commitments. It ain’t quantum physics.

Conscious living

Perspective is crucial. Not losing perspective is key to maintaining your sanity. Perspective comes from “conscious living”: This staying focused on the present; getting at the real truth; gaining greater awareness of thoughts, beliefs and behaviors and the influences they have on us; making more conscious decisions and taking deliberate actions; and celebrating the beauty that is in all of us.

It also requires development of these ten traits as described by the (Norman Vincent) Peale Institute: Optimism, Enthusiasm, Confidence, Determination, Belief, Patience, Calmness, Integrity, Courage, and Focus. These five are particularly important to self-management:

1. Optimism—A belief in and expectation of positive outcomes, even in the face of difficulty, challenge or crisis.
2. Enthusiasm—Having high levels of interest, positive energy, passion, or personal motivation.
3. Belief—Trusting in oneself, others, and maybe a higher spiritual power to provide support and guidance when needed.
4. Integrity—Acting on a personal commitment to honesty, openness and fairness; and living in accordance with your standards.
5. Courage—The willingness to take risks and overcome fears, even when the outcome is uncertain.

Optimism

Three ways to demonstrate optimism:

1. Meet all challenges with a feeling of control. Decide how you would like the outcome to look, and then organize yourself and plan for success as in approaching any problem.
2. Identify the benefits of the crisis, problem or difficulty. Learn from each and every action you take—from both the positive and negative results.
3. Keep your energy level up and visible—both to others and to yourself.

Regain your perspective now

A loss of perspective can result from avoidance of the real issues of concern to you, surrendering to the sense that you have no control over events, and feeling stuck.

Take Inventory

"I am suffocated and lost when I have not the bright feeling of progression." — Margaret Fuller

Set aside 15 minutes on your calendar to review your calendar for the last five months. Make a list of all the positive changes you've made and plan to do something special to celebrate.

Take Control

"Do not waste worry. If you're going to worry, worry well. Put that energy to good use; aim it at an answer. Don't forget: Nothing diminishes anxiety faster than action." — Walter Anderson

Stop for a few moments to ponder these two questions:

- *What am I worried about?*
- *What actions have I been avoiding?*

Then accept without question whatever answer pops into your head. Take action to address the problem. Remember this formula: "inaction = anxiety," and "action = peace of mind."

Take Action

"When we are the most overwhelmed, we are the least resourceful."

— *Anthony Robbins*

Now consider the area of your life where you feel most overwhelmed and spend a few minutes reflecting on it. Then, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths and ask yourself this question:

- *"What one thing could I do to completely eliminate the source of my sense of being overwhelmed?"*

Write down whatever occurs to you (no censoring your answers). Ask yourself several times, then pick one idea for change that came to you and work on it this week. Try it and see how quickly you begin to feel relaxed and resourceful!

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