

Being a Good Self-coach Requires Time Away for Play



Self-coaching requires a lot of hard work. It also requires a lot of time to play. The trick is for executives to find the right balance.

**By Susan Kushnir, Talent Economy Coaching Columnist
June 8, 2017**



Remember that spooky scene in the 1980 film “The Shining” when the main character, Jack Torrance’s wife, Wendy, finds Jack’s lengthy manuscript? Jack, the caretaker of an inn, wrote it over the course of a few months. Rather than reading the well-written manuscript she expected, Wendy found pages and pages of text with only the proverb “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.”

Maria Edgeworth in her 1825 book “Harry and Lucy Concluded” added to this famous proverb with:

“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,
All play and no work makes Jack a mere toy.”

Interestingly enough, Edgeworth’s added text is useful advice when coaching oneself. Coaching oneself requires a lot of hard work. Coaching oneself also

requires a lot of time to play. Finding the balance between working hard and playing hard is one of the tricks to being successful.

Working Hard:

Wendy Wollner is president and CEO of Balancing Life's Issues Inc., a corporate training firm based in Ossining, New York. She is known for her no-nonsense coaching and feedback. Her advice? "You must ensure you have comprehensive knowledge in your field or you will become complacent. Read the NY Times best sellers and gold standard literature in your field. Seek out and talk to experts who are doing now what you see yourself doing in the future."

Coaching yourself for improvement requires deep inner perspective that is difficult but necessary to commit and recommit to. Wendy continues, "Coach yourself to do things that are out of your comfort zone. Determination, perseverance and tenacity are key ingredients for your success. When I coach clients toward setting goals, I push them to be challenged to the level where they must grow in order to achieve those goals. Improving ourselves requires overcoming discomfort and is not meant to be easy and shouldn't be taken lightly."

Playing Hard:

But, as Jack told us in "The Shining," playing is also important. The conscious incorporation of laughter, exercise and outside activities need to be part of your coaching plan.

How much time are you allocating to all things other than work? Many driven employees find that their work life gradually overshadows their time outside of work. Consider Diana Thomas, executive coach and a former vice president at McDonald's. She said that early on in her career as a new leader, "I realized I was focusing all my time at work, and not doing enough of the things that gave me that extra joy and fuel to make me the most productive. I wasn't involved in my church, exercising or even at my daughter's school. Even my marriage was suffering. I needed to learn to say 'no' to things in order to focus on what was most important to me."

Several steps Thomas took and advises others to take include:

- Say "no" to requests that aren't in line with your professional and personal strategy. "A friend of mine said, 'If you die tomorrow, your company will be fine but your family will be devastated.' That advice resonated with me and I needed to ensure my activities were aligned with what was most important to me."
- Aim for workplace integration, not balance since you need to integrate work and personal. Balancing is not the goal.

- Schedule 30-minute meetings rather than hour-long meetings and ensure you have 15 minutes between meetings. “If you are running from meeting to meeting, you aren’t being strategic and most likely not demonstrating executive presence when you begin your next meeting. Instead, you’re just rushing, which isn’t good for your health or your job.”

The Importance of a balanced Pie:

Figuring out how aligned your values and activities with your goals are is as easy as pie — or at least, a pie chart. This exercise is designed to graphically show you your professional and personal balance.

- Start by taking an inventory of what is important to you. Consider things like faith, community, family, work and health, to name a few.
- Draw a circle and divide it into pie pieces based on what is important to you. The bigger the slice, the more important the topic is. As an example, if health is more important to you than community then the health slice should be larger.
- Now draw a ruler within each slice and label it 1-10 with the 1 being closest to the center of the circle. This ruler represents your level of satisfaction within that area of your life. The 1 indicates that you aren’t satisfied in this area of your life and a rating of a 10 indicates that you’re completely satisfied with this area.
- Think of the pie’s outer edge as being completely satisfied (10) and the center as being totally dissatisfied (0). Give a rating to your level of satisfaction in each of the areas you’ve listed by placing a dot to indicate the level of satisfaction you have in each particular area of your life. Next, draw evenly spaced circles starting from the center of the pie.
- This pie chart becomes your graphical representation of your work integration balance.

Now, it’s time for reflection. After looking at this completed graph, are your activities in line with your values? Are you spending the right amount of time on what’s important to you? Is your life balanced or skewed to one area? What changes, if any, would like to make?

Avoiding the road to exhausted mediocrity:

Progress and success requires tradeoffs, and not easy tradeoffs.

Lori Trahan, chief executive officer at Concire Leadership Institute, a learning and advisory firm, explains the importance of making conscious tradeoffs. “Take the resources from what customers don’t care about and reinvest these resources,” she said. “So many Type-As are super smart yet they feel that they can’t be bad at anything. Trying to be good at everything leads to exhausted mediocrity.”

Clearly, it isn't possible to be the best at everything. Once you understand and embrace tradeoffs, it is easier to identify which tradeoffs you need to make to find balance.

Evaluate your Stakeholder's Needs:

Begin with the end in mind; what is the most important to your stakeholders? The goal is to create a Stakeholder's Analysis by asking yourself:

- Who are your stakeholders?
- Why do you care about their needs?

The most erroneous mindset is to think you already know what the client wants. Often, the client's position changes or the client changes. The most effective way to avoid this mindset is to regularly ask the client about their changing needs so you can be helpful to them. Use data from evaluation tools, management meetings, feedback conversations and annual reports.

Once you are crystal clear about what the client most needs, you can determine what tradeoffs you can make.

You, a work in progress:

How do we ensure that time doesn't "get away from us"? One way is to create a WILO (Week In the Life Of), a highly regarded Lean Management tool. A WILO is designed to help us focus on the tasks that we consider the most important rather than firefighting urgent tasks.

Basically, the WILO is an overview of your standard calendar designed to give an understanding of how you spend your time. Once you develop your WILO, you'll be better able to track the time you're spending working toward your personal coaching goals as well as the balance between working and playing.

It will also help you determine which things you can:

- Stop.
- Delegate.
- Do with Lower Frequency.
- Do with Lower Duration.

After all, it is important to schedule time for fun and volunteerism, as well as networking and business meetings.

Susan Kushnir is director of lean management at S&P Global. To comment, email editor@talenteconomy.io.