



Balance

By Lee Cockerell

What is balance? What do we mean when we say we don't have balance in our lives?

I will take a stab at what I think it means, at Disney anyway. I think we think we work too much . . . or that we spend too much time at work . . . and are not getting enough time to do other things in our lives that interest us or are of great importance to us. These things could be spending more time with our families, our friends, our place of worship, or community interests. It could be that we don't think we have the time to develop ourselves for future advancement in our careers by going back to school or taking courses. It could mean that we don't think we have the time to exercise or to just spend time alone relaxing or doing our favorite hobby or just simply reading or taking a nap-and naps are important. My mother-in-law, Sunshine, said, "Lee, if you boys would take a nap every day, you would do better work." She did not mean boys. She meant you men and women, and I think she was right.

As a professional leader, you have to stop thinking of your life as two lives, personal and business. You have just one life, and you need to be successful with that one life and learn to manage it . . . which means that you have to get all of your responsibilities accomplished every 24 hours, which is one 24-hour life. Yes-I do personal things at work and work things at home because it all just has to get done. I don't think of my life as personal and work. I just think about it as LIFE.

Believe it or not, many of the reasons we don't have balance are often our own fault. No doubt, we will all have jobs or assignments during our careers where the demands are great; and we have to give up balance for a period of time, sometimes weeks and sometimes a few months-hopefully, though, not years.

The fact of the matter is that when you decide to become a professional leader, you do give up a lot of the so-called balance in your life; and when you join the *Walt Disney World*® Resort, you have signed up for the top pro team in the world.

I am sure there are thousands of companies you could work at that don't work at the level of intensity, quality, and speed that we do. We are the best. You know that, and I know that.

I want to give you a list of things to consider that might help you find "balance" in your life. I would love to hear back from you if you have other ideas and tactics you use to get more balance, so we can share it with everyone.

1. Are you organized? Do you really take time to plan your day, every day, focusing on putting the right priority on urgent, vital, important, and limited-value tasks? Do you go to time-management classes, and then ignore what you learned? Are you suffering from lack of personal self-discipline and blaming the Company or others for your lack of balance? One of

One of the most important questions you should ask yourself often is: What should I be working on today that will not pay off for 5, 10, 15, 20, or even 40 years from now? We talk about this in the time-management class I teach, so come on over and find out this important answer.

2. Do you have one calendar where you schedule your appointments, meetings, and priorities in your life? Your calendar will reflect your priorities. We all usually have time to do what we want to do-but not necessarily what we should do.

3. Being candid and getting to the point with people saves a lot of time. One-hour meetings quickly are cut in half. Instead of scheduling one-hour, two-hour, and three-hour meetings, think of 15, 20, 25, and 50 minutes for a meeting. Just think of what would happen if every one-hour meeting became 45 minutes instead. YOU would have 2 1/2 hours extra a day in a 10-hour day . . . and that's a great nap!

4. How much time do you waste every day? Did you know that if you waste 30 minutes a day that it translates to 2 1/2, 50-hour work weeks a year? For instance, I don't go to lunch most days for more than 10 minutes. That saves me from 20 to 30 minutes. Lunch meetings in restaurants are suspect as to their value, not counting the drive time. Saving this time allows me to go work out at 5:15 p.m. every day. Packing a lunch translates into a lot of time saved. Maybe time management was the reason the lunch box was invented. Yes, I know you should take time to have a peaceful lunch and to socialize. I just get my peace and socializing later in the day at the gym.

5. Do you organize your briefcase with all of the things you need to do your work wherever you are? Carry your mail with you, so you can do it when you get to a meeting early or when a meeting ends early. You can return phone calls at any time if you have all of your messages and phone numbers with you and your messages recorded in your day planner. Remember: 5 minutes here and 5 minutes there really add up. You can do a lot in 5 minutes. Remember: some people run a mile in less than 4 minutes. I made the decision to resign from my former employer 10 years ago to join Disney within 5 minutes after discussing it with Priscilla; and then I took a 55-minute nap that I needed from the stress of that decision.

6. Set up a home office so that you can work when you feel like it at home. I am not talking about a room. Just make sure you have a spot to work and the supplies you need at your fingertips to get your work done. Remember, all of those bad commercials on television? You can get a lot of work done during them, or you can talk to that special person in your life during these commercials; and that will create some balance too. I wrote this paper while watching television.

7. Are you using technology efficiently and effectively? How often do you use e-mail, voice mail, fax, a telephone call, or a handwritten note to get the job done? How often could you just pick up the phone and call someone versus writing a big long memo that needs to be typed, edited, and sent out. And then you run the risk of being misunderstood, which can turn out to be a giant time-waster because of the time you need to recover. Are you personally using your



computer to communicate, or are you still in the Dark Ages of using paper and pencil and giving it to a secretary to type? Because we are all in close proximity to one another, we often call a meeting when a phone call or conference call would work just fine.

8. Have you surrounded yourself with excellent performers? How many average and poor performers work for you whom you have not focused on-through coaching, counseling, or other developmental processes-so that they can be more productive, leaving you time to do what you do best . . . or to take a nap?

9. Have you clearly communicated how you work with your direct reports? Have you clarified each person's role including responsibilities, authority levels, what you hold them accountable for, and the consequences for not performing? Do you give them consistent, timely, candid feedback? Do you give them encouragement as well and private and public praise? This alone will help their balance because it will make them feel more secure.

10. Do you live too far from work? Long commutes take up a lot of time if you are a busy leader. Sometimes, when you live too far away, you find yourself leaving earlier than you should and arriving later than you should. This can affect your performance in all aspects of your life, although for some people, the commute is effective for thinking, making phone calls, and for enjoying a calm-down period. I lived one hour from work early in my career, and I learned a good lesson. The house was bigger, but my son was always asleep when I left and asleep when I got home. Next move was to a smaller home close to work so I was able to spend more time with my family and get my job done.

11. Have you had a conversation with your leader about things that are important to you and worked out a plan and schedule in advance so you can do these things? These could be going to school at night, taking care of family responsibilities, etc. The sooner you discuss them, the better your chances of getting a "yes" answer from your leader. The early bird really does catch the worm.

12. I remember when my son was a senior in high school. I committed to cook the pre-game football meals for the team every Friday. That meant I had to get home by 1 p.m. on Fridays to prepare the food and have it at the school by 3 p.m. I told my leader that I needed to do this and even adjusted my travel schedule for these 10 weeks. Most leaders are human and will work with you on important family balance situations. These 10 weeks created some great memories before my son left home the following year, and the company did not fall apart. I was even more productive because I felt so good about my leader treating me as an individual. I also attended all teachers' meetings in the evenings at school because when the schedule came out in September each year, I blocked it in my schedule. Balance means a lot of things; for instance, in my office, I always have a rule to accept calls from my wife, no matter whom I am meeting with. I did this because Priscilla told me to with a question. The question was, "Who is more important than me?" There is only one answer to that question, and you know what it is.

13. Sometimes you are just taking on too much and have to give something up if you really



want some balance and stress relief. I had someone call me one day to get my advice. He said that his life was too hectic and that he seemed never to have enough time to get it all done. When he was single, balance was pretty good. Now he is married with a new house, a demanding job, playing sports on weekends, and practice on Wednesday nights. Then a new baby arrived, and he was going to graduate school, and his spouse worked. After I said “WOW,” my advice was to think about what should be given up or postponed for a while. Sometimes it’s just that simple. You have to learn to say “NO.” All of us have to do trade-offs and think about what to give up at different periods in our lives. I know people who have two days off every week and play golf and don’t spend time with their families, and then complain about no balance. Well, their spouse complains at least. Balance is about everyone in the relationship being satisfied. Ask yourself this question-If you have to pick one: Is it more important to wash the dishes or read to your children before bed? If your mother-in-law is staying with you, you have to do both or use paper plates.

14. Another thing we all have to think about is what are we willing to pay for to have more balance: the lawn, home repairs, etc.

15. There are two questions you need to ask yourself and then take action on the answer to those two questions. You can actually ask yourself these two questions in your personal and business life. Question 1: What am I currently doing that others could be trained or contracted to do, leaving me free to do the things where I can make a greater impact or leaving me the time to have more balance? Question 2: What am I currently doing that I don’t need to be doing at all? If you take this exercise seriously, you will be happily surprised with the amount of time you can find. You especially need to go through this exercise when you are promoted or have additional responsibilities in your personal life.

16. The next area to think about is: Are you happy doing what you do? Do you love your job? If not, work on finding something that you love; and you will be happier and feel better and more balanced.

17. Be careful about calling meetings at odd hours of the day. We should focus on 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. as the window for meetings to start and stop. People do have to get their kids to day care and pick them up, go to that teacher’s meeting, church event, etc. Of course, from time to time there will be exceptions; but most of the time, we can do this.

18. Remember that this balance issue would be felt at any company unless You Focus On It.

19. Structurally, we need to talk to each individual on the team and understand the individual’s personal needs and desires. While we can’t develop an ongoing, weekly routine that undermines the team effectiveness, we should be sensitive to personal needs and limit disruptions as much as possible and still run the business.

20. When Maya Angelou spoke to us, I will never forget what she said about withdrawing from time to time to get the things done that are really important. She talked about how she gets a new book written with all of the other demands in her life to travel, speak, and counsel



people. She said, “I just withdraw. I rent a hotel room near my house, and I go there at 5:30 a.m. every morning and write until 1 p.m.; and the next thing you know, in 30 to 40 days I have written another new book.”

I agree with this and loved her story. I often withdraw for a few hours and go to a quiet place like the public library and get the really important stuff done like thinking and finishing this balance paper.

You may want to think about withdrawing yourself for a couple of days each year. THINK about how you are managing your life and what changes you might want to make in order to make it better. Instead of waiting for the New Year to make new resolutions, do it a few times a year.

The Wall Street Journal had an article on how new, young generals in the army are being sent to charm school to make them more sensitive to people and to learn how to be better, more effective leaders. The last paragraph of the article is interesting and humorous and reads as follows: “The week ends with some final advice from General Remier. He emphasizes time management, noting that General George Marshall ran World War II and still took a daily nap after lunch and went home by 4:30 p.m. He implies these generals certainly can run Camp Swampy without burning out themselves and their staffs. Adds the lanky Four-Star General: “Get your own coffee. It keeps you humble.”

At the end of the day, YOU have more control over your life than anyone else does. This is a tough subject, but it can be managed. As you can see, balance means something different to each individual . . . and mostly that individual is the only one who can do anything about it; and the way you think about it will be different at different times of your life.

