Maintaining a Work-Life Balance in a Productive Career (Excerpt: *Thriving in Higher Education Careers)*

**MegaTip 1: Spend your time doing things and having thoughts that are non-urgent and important**

Steven Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* provides a useful way to categorize the way we spend time. The things we do and thoughts we have are important when they reflect our core goals, values and relationships. The more of our lives we spend doing those things, with those people, and thinking those thoughts which are most important to us while taking good care of ourselves, the more in balance we feel. When we spend time on things that are unimportant we pay a big price. Not only do we squeeze time and energy from our core, spending less time nurturing our core brings unpleasant repercussions which require a response. Neglecting your family creates severe tensions. Inadequate sleep and relaxation, poor nutrition, and a sedentary lifestyle collectively lead to poor health outcomes.

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| URGENT and IMPORTANT  Reaction to crises created when insufficient attention is given to your core/self-care while it is not yet urgent.  ***By avoiding the unimportant, you avoid having to respond to crises.*** | NON-URGENT and IMPORTANT  Proactive investment in   * Core Relationships * Core Goals * Core Values * Self-Care   ***Strive to stay here.*** |
| URGENT and UNIMPORTANT  Requests from others or standards for yourself that are not consistent with your important aspects.   * Email, calls, texts * Requests to participate in activity outside your job description   ***Just say no. Delegate****.* ***Delay.*** | NON-URGENT and UNIMPORTANT   * Trifling people * Trifling thoughts * Trifling activities   ***“I can resist anything but temptation.” Oscar Wilde.*** |

[Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.pdf](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/upwardbound/books/the-7-habits-ofhighly-effective-people.pdf)

When one is pretending the entire body revolts. *Anaïs Nin*

Perpetual devotion to what a man calls his business, is only to be sustained by perpetual neglect of many other things. [*Robert Louis Stevenson*](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/854076.Robert_Louis_Stevenson)

**Tip 2: Prioritize**

Time is finite. When you say yes to something unimportant you are saying no to something important.

Using Steven Covey’s matrix, plan your next day so that you intentionally choose to spend your time investing in those aspects of your life that are most important to you. Look closely at the items on the calendar, which are urgent but unimportant to you? Can I get out of this task? Delegate this task? What can I do with what I have now and avoid spending more time? Write a “stop saying yes to this request” note to yourself. And beware of the distant elephant. We have a strong temptation to say yes to requests for events far in the future. But when the elephant is close at hand, it is unwieldy.

[14 Secrets to Expanding Time](http://www.kevinkruse.com/14-secrets-to-expanding-time/)

It is not a daily increase, but a daily decrease. Hack away at the inessentials.  [*Bruce Lee*](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/32579.Bruce_Lee)

Action expresses priorities.  [*Mahatma Gandhi*](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/5810891.Mahatma_Gandhi)

**Tip 3: Manage Interruptions**

Here we mean both interruptions by others (email, text) and self-interruptions (FaceBook). One effective strategy is called the “pomodoro”. Developed by Francesco Cirillo to add discipline to his study time, the pomodoro also makes your work time more effective by working in a manner consistent with your brain’s effectiveness. You can try it:

1. Pick a short task that can be completed in 25 minutes
2. Turn email and phone off and close your door
3. Set a timer for 25 minutes and start
4. Self-interruption? Jot it down and bring your focus back
5. When timer rings, mark # of distractions
6. Take a 3-5 minute break to rest your mind (not email.. deep breathing or quick walk)
7. After your 4th pomodoro, take a 15-30 minute break

[Pomodoro Technique](http://lifehacker.com/productivity-101-a-primer-to-the-pomodoro-technique-1598992730)

Other people's interruptions of your work are relatively insignificant compared with the countless times you interrupt yourself. *Brendan Francis*

**Tip 4: Disobey Parkinson’s Law**

Parkinson, a British civil servant wrote that “work expands to fill the time available for its completion” in a 1955 article in the Economist. By setting a firm start and end time to each day, you force time to be the master of the task. This means both that you prioritize the tasks and manage the scope of any task. Always ask yourself, how comprehensive and detailed can I be in the time I have available? When considering a task, think in terms of SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). By thinking SMART, you are mindful of the balance between something that is realistic in the time available, but still meaningful in terms of your criteria for importance.

Work expands to fill the time available for its completion. *Cyril Parkinson*

**Tip 5: Notice when you feel self-care is beginning to slide**

Sleep-deprivation begets irritability. Irritability begets a loss of filter. A loss of filter always begets a statement you will come to regret. Self-care is so critical to maintaining a meaningful career in higher education that it appears in most of our posts.

[25 Self Care Tips](http://gentlelivingonline.com/self-growth/25-self-care-tips-for-the-body-soul/)

To experience peace does not mean that your life is always blissful. It means that you are capable of tapping into a blissful state of mind amidst the normal chaos of a hectic life. *Jill Bolte Taylor*

Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths. *Etty Hillesum*

One cannot think well, love well, or sleep well, if one has not dined well. *Virginia Woolf*