Create Boundaries for Work-Life Balance
By K.J. McCorry

Source: http://www.bcbr.com/databank.asp?djoPage=article_details&djoId=50738

March 19, 2010

Source: Boulder County Business Report

Work-life balance is difficult to create in today's technological world where data and connectivity are not only easily accessible but also seemingly required 24/7.

It is up to you to define and draw the boundary between your work and your life - to create a balance. The key to finding that work-life balance is developing a clear definition of it for yourself and an intentional strategy to create it in your life.

Today's reality is that you will never get it all done. The world where everything is checked off your task list before you leave work doesn't exist anymore. There will always be something that needs to be left behind. The key is to focus on what is "next" and what is "important."

Often we do not have to do everything now; many times things can be deferred to a future date and time. The feeling that you have to get it all done is a tremendous barrier to achieving work-life balance.

As each of us is different, how we do our job and set our priorities is an individual undertaking. The same is true when defining who we are as people and determining our personal responsibility. The only person who can define your work-life balance is you. There is no correct or perfect definition and, more importantly, the work-life balance you define today will change as your life evolves in the future.

Regardless, a key driver for most individuals is getting more time with the people who are important to you and doing the things that you enjoy the most. The following are a few questions. Writing down your answers will help you determine what work-life balance means for you.

- What would be different in my life if I had work-life balance?
- What is the most important priority in my life that seems to get pushed aside because of work?
- What do I enjoy doing that I rarely get to do?
- If I had a free day, with no commitments, what activities would I do and with whom would I spend it?
- If I had the ability to choose a perfect work day, how many hours per week would I work and when would I work them?
- What life goals do I have that I have not achieved yet?

Once you have a definition of what work-life balance means, then it is important to create a specific work-life balance plan for yourself. Write down your goals to achieve your definition of work-life balance. You can categorize these goals in categories such as family, health, personal growth and spirituality. With each goal, be sure to write down specific actions with each. For example, if a goal is to have more time with your family, then a specific action might be "take my daughter one night a week to soccer games" or "be home early two nights a week to have dinner with my family." Make sure they are not only specific but actionable.

When you have clear goals and actions, a set of accountability triggers will support the actions you want to take. Each of us has different triggers that move us to action. Some accountability triggers could be enrolling in a class, creating an appointment or blocking out some time on your calendar, or setting up a meeting or planning time with a person to take a specific action. Determine what trigger will help you accomplish the work-life balance actions you wish to take.

Studies have consistently shown that when you write down goals there is a dramatic increase in the likelihood of you achieving those goals. According to the American Society of Training and Development, when a goal is written down with a plan of action and an established accountability technique, then the likelihood that you will accomplish those goals increases to more than 65 percent.

As with anything in our lives, there will be barriers to achieving work-life balance, even though you have crafted a plan. To help you overcome barriers, make a list of everything that you think will prohibit you from implementing the plan. Then, write down things you can do to counteract those barriers. I usually find that if you have solid accountability triggers developed, then the barriers are reduced.

Re-evaluate your work-life balance plan on a monthly or quarterly basis and adjust as needed. Although you might not achieve all your work-life balance actions right away, you will be heading in the right direction.

K.J. McCorry is chief executive of Officiency Enterprises, consulting services that help offices become more productive, efficient, and sustainable with resources and time. She is the author of "Organize Your Work Day In No Time," released by Que Publishing. She can be reached at info@officiency.com .