

EXECUTIVE VITALITY™: INTEGRATION AS BALANCE

In recent interviews of direct reports of a CEO, one of the direct reports, Sam, said, “We don’t think about ‘work life balance’ as much as an integrated life.” Sam and I started talking about the reality of balance in the C-suite and laughed. I agree with the old *Fast Company* article title, “Balance Is Bunk.” In the end, it is desirable, and perhaps essential, for senior executives to have a healthy, integrated, multidimensional life to be effective. The conversation with Sam was interesting, so I did a little research and stumbled into an article from a C-suite executive at American Express (link below) that says “Instead of chasing the holy grail of work-life balance, know that there is a third option centered on work-life integration.”

What we find in our coaching practice on the subject of balance is this: the best way to determine if you are integrated isn’t by consulting your own perception but rather the perceptions of others combined with your own point of view. Who are the key people in your life? Ask *them* if they see you as well-integrated.

One’s own perception of being balanced, we believe, is more about a *feeling* of balance than actually being balanced. It is perhaps a sense of contentment and, on a good day, joy. It is feeling more energy than exhaustion. It is feeling a sense of control over one’s life – without getting too metaphysical about how much control we really do have over our lives. It is feeling “satisfied with one’s lot in life.” It is a sense of purpose and congruity—***in other words, we experience balance when our actions match our values.***

What is a call to action to achieve integration?

1. Start with self-reflection and then ask some close friends and associates. Gain some awareness about the degree of integration of your life. For example, where do you fall on this continuum:

Energy  Exhaustion

Think about all of the “measures” listed above and consider how you would evaluate yourself on each continuum. For example, where are you on the balance, contentment, or happiness continuum?

2. Realize that you have choices to make in your life, within whatever constraints you have. You have choices about how much “free” time you have and how to use it. Do you make choices that fit your values?
3. Think about how you can restructure your life. New career, new job, different locale, time allocated to working, education, hobbies...
4. Not only should your actions match your values, but perhaps even more basically, your career, position, or job should match your values. Make sure that what you get out of bed to do every day inspires you because you are doing something you believe in, something that matters to you.
5. The same applies outside your workplace. Are you treating family and friends the way you believe you should? Are you engaging in volunteer or other activities that integrate with your world view?

What changes can you make in the short-, medium-, and long-term to achieve “balance” as defined here? How do you see the benefits to yourself and those around you of your making such changes?

Citations:

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-sobbott/an-integrated-life_b_3428344.html