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Preface

*In three words I can sum up everything
that I've learned about life: It goes on.*

Robert Frost

Writing and speaking about finding better balance and happiness in life is extremely fulfilling. It creates new experiences from which I draw interesting insights and connections and lets me share my observations and stories with others. The more I write about it and speak about it, the more I get to share. What good is wisdom if it's not shared?

In my first book, *21 Days to Better Balance*, I introduced 21 themes to help readers connect with themselves and find more balance in their mind, body, and spirit. My second book, *21 Steps to Better Relationships*, helped readers strengthen their relationships and find more balance with others. With this third book, I hope to help readers unlock their full potential and find better work/life balance.

Balance is a natural state. Returning to better balance means removing the barriers to balance within us, many of them created by our own thoughts and behaviors. In this book, I highlight the guiding principles that have had the largest impact on my ability to balance my work and personal life. Sometimes the best teacher is our own experience.

So many people strive to maintain a successful career and a fulfilling personal life. My hope is that the personal observations, insights, and stories I've used to help find better work/life balance in my life will help you find better balance in yours.

To your best balanced life!

Michael Thomas Sunnarborg
May 2013

Introduction

Do what you love and love what you do, for what you do most says most about you.

A recent study from Cox Media Group found that 89 percent of Americans view their work and life balance as a significant problem. Whether it's due to the expansion of technology or the plethora of choices that we face each day, our ability to filter information and stay focused is a constant challenge. The speed of our world is accelerating at an exponential rate and it doesn't appear that it will slow down any time soon. It's no wonder that it becomes more and more difficult to balance priorities between family, friends, and personal obligations while supporting our careers.

You have the potential to make healthy choices and balance your priorities no matter where you are on your life journey. However, change doesn't come easily—it takes courage, dedication, and commitment. Lasting change comes in small steps. Each step evolves into a new habit, and over time, healthy habits become major life changes. By seeking to understand yourself better, learning to focus your energy, and practicing new healthy habits, you can find a better balance of your work and life.

There are three chapters in this book, each focusing on one of three stages: awareness, alignment, and activation. Each chapter leads you through seven keys that will facilitate the balance process. Each key is designed to gently shift your perspective, remove barriers, and help you to unlock your full potential. Through this process, you will have the opportunity to establish new thoughts and perspectives that will help bring more balance in your work and life.

Each of the 21 keys has a theme and a story, and at the end of each theme are questions for a Balance

Plan and a Key Actuator, which are distinguishable by the following icons:



Balance Plan questions



Key Actuator

You might find it useful to journal about the questions or simply mull them over during your day. They can also serve as a useful meditation focus; simply bring the questions into your mind during your regular meditation practice and notice the thoughts that float up in response. The Key Actuator is a “to-do” activity designed to help you apply the lessons from each theme. Putting theory into action helps integrate the concepts directly into your experience.

The keys are progressive and will make the most sense if you read them in order—at least the first time through. Then after you’ve completed the book, you can return to any of the themes or activities to refresh yourself as needed.

The content in this book is very direct. If any of the introductory text feels overwhelming, try skipping down and reading the accompanying story before re-reading the larger messages. This may help you set the appropriate context for the theme.

Along with the informative messages and insights, this book will help you create a Balance Plan. The plan is meant to help you apply the insights contained in this book. A plan template is included in the *21 Keys to Work/Life Balance Workbook* available at 21keystoworklifebalance.com. Start by thinking of an area in your life where you’d like to create better balance, and then use the plan to document your answers to the questions. Your plan can help support you in brainstorming potential actions and

improvements. You can repeat the process for multiple areas of your work or personal life in which you'd like to find better balance—simply apply the questions from any or all of the keys.

Remember: The power to make changes in your life is *always* in your hands. Make a commitment to paying closer attention to your priorities at work and at home and create the momentum for better work/life balance in your life today. It's your choice.

Let's get started!

Chapter 1: Welcome to Awareness

Awareness

*To become different from what we are,
we must have some awareness of what we are.*

Eric Hoffer

We are always learning. Our powerful consciousness is absorbing and processing everything in our environment—including information, sights, sounds, and smells—whether we realize it or not. From our experiences we make choices using the power of our thoughts, feelings, and intuition. In order to find better work/life balance, we must first become aware of the factors that influence our lives on a daily basis.

The first seven keys focus on awareness. Raising our awareness reminds us that the power to influence our work/life balance always begins with noticing what's happening in the present moment.

Key 1: The Balance Myth

Awareness

*There is no secret to balance.
You just have to feel the waves.*

Frank Herbert

Is there really such a thing as work/life balance? Many say it's a myth. Balance implies harmony or equilibrium among *opposing elements*. Imagine what this looks like on a scale—work and life are not only separated, but at opposite ends of the spectrum. In this way, the idea of “work/life balance” supports the idea that work and life are separated. This myth of separation is supported by our environments. Since most people leave their home to go to work each day, the differences between work and home environments shift our energy and force us to refocus.

Now consider a different picture. Visualize your life as a circle with work as one of many different circles contained within it. All of our thoughts, feelings, and actions are constantly flowing in and out of these circles—now work and life are not opposing elements but rather work is one element in a much larger “life.” Work is a part of life. The two elements are integrated. The answer to finding better work/life balance is to find the right blend between all our life activities—regardless of where and when they occur.

*A true balance between work and life
comes with knowing that your life
activities are integrated, not separated.*

Janelle felt like she was always behind. Her office was so different than her quiet home. It was no wonder she often had to stay late to get all her work done. When she first started her job five years ago, her team was very small—only seven people. But Janelle’s team had grown to 24 and she felt like she was slowly sinking. When Janelle got a new boss, Barbara, things changed. Barbara suggested that Janelle consider working from home a day or two a

week. Whereas Janelle's former boss had never supported working remotely, Barbara trusted her employees and understood the value of flexibility.

Working remotely helped Janelle to minimize distractions and maximize her productivity. The blend of working partly in the office and partly at home helped Janelle learn a new type of discipline—one that increased her productivity by helping her stay more focused when she worked from home. After only a month on the new schedule, Janelle found that coming to the office was more enjoyable. Things changed for the better. She had finally found the right blend.



How does your current focus at work and home balance out? What's working well? What's not?



What are some things you are doing to create a better blend between your work and life?



One + One

This week, write down one thing you'd like to *stop* doing and one thing you'd like to *start* doing to help bring better balance between your work and home life. For example, *I will stop checking my email every ten minutes*, and, *I will start taking a 30-minute walk each day*. Put this list where you can see it—on your laptop, iPad, desktop, or sticky note in your car—and make a commitment to changing *only* those two things this week.