



## Facilitator — February/March 2012



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### Sharpen Your Tools

Jon Wee

#### Staying in Balance

Before everything you're balancing comes crashing down around you, follow some tips gleaned from the world of juggling

If you often feel like a juggler, trying to balance all the different responsibilities of your life, you're not alone. Between work demands, home and family obligations, interests and hobbies, community involvement and personal/professional development pursuits, many people feel they have too many balls in the air at once. And unfortunately, the situation is only getting worse.

With the proliferation of PDAs, cell phones and other technologies, we often have no escape from the barrage of intrusions: clients calling after hours, the boss assigning yet another project and friends needing help. People expect us to always be reachable at a moment's notice. For many, the very tools that were supposed to make our lives easier have only made us more stressed.

How bad is the problem? A recent study of more than 50,000 employees from a variety of manufacturing and service organizations found that two out of every five employees are dissatisfied with the balance between their work and their personal lives. That means for many people, their work life and home life aren't coexisting harmoniously, and people feel the stresses associated with being out of balance.

#### Regaining Balance

Before all your balls in the air come crashing down around you, follow some tips gleaned from the world of juggling. After all, if professional jugglers like ourselves can balance chain saws, flaming torches and butcher knives without a scratch, we can certainly teach others a thing or two about balance. The following are some secrets from the world of juggling that can apply to anyone's life.

Allow yourself to focus on one thing at a time (i.e., pay attention to the chain saw). During juggling routines, a juggler must pay attention to many different things—the items he or she is juggling, the speed with which the items are moving in the air, the size and weight of each item, and so on. However, there are certain moments or certain objects that demand all the juggler's attention at once, such as a buzzing chain saw falling into their hands.

The same thing happens in everyday life. There are times when a large part of your day solely focuses on work, not on your kids, your vacation or your finances. When that time comes, don't fight it. Allow it to happen, knowing that you'll have to focus on something else exclusively at another time. If necessary, arrange your day to allow for that focused time. Tell others your schedule so they know they can't disrupt you during that time. You may even have to leave the office early or turn off your cell phone.

Do what you must to keep your focus on the item at hand. By doing so, you'll be more effective when you later address the other areas of your life. And you'll avoid a nasty mishap with that chain saw!

Focus a little bit on everything at once (i.e., keep all the plates spinning). When a juggler is spinning plates, he or she must focus on and tend to all the plates at the same time. If the juggler were to only focus on one spinning plate, all the others would quickly come crashing down.

At times, life is a lot like plate spinning. You know how it goes: your child's school is on the phone, the repair

man is at the front door, your boss is calling on your cell phone and now the meal you were cooking on the stove has caught fire. You have to jump from one thing to another just to keep the fires out (literally).

The problem is that many people don't know how to spin several plates or juggle numerous balls at once. Then, when life demands that skill, they get overwhelmed. That's when we feel out of balance. Therefore, practice multi-tasking on a regular basis. Your ability to juggle multiple things at once, when necessary, will actually help you feel more balanced and relaxed during times of stress. And it'll prevent you from breaking too many plates.

Simplify wherever you can (i.e., know your juggling limits). Just because a juggler can juggle five balls effortlessly doesn't mean he can juggle 10 balls. And just because someone can juggle flaming torches doesn't mean she can also juggle chainsaws. Every juggler has limits.

Your life has limits too. Look back over your calendar or daily planner and analyze where you spend your time. Get rid of any unnecessary commitments or at least put something on the back burner temporarily. If you're involved in too many committees or trying to learn too many hobbies, or if your children are a part of too many after-school activities, you'll need to decide what's not necessary so you can simplify and get in balance.

Realize that some cuts may only be temporary. Do a regular evaluation of your time so you can see when you can take on something new and when you have to put things aside. Too many people today get overcommitted to too many things, and then they wonder why they have no life balance. Know what you really can do given your time constraints, and get rid of the rest, at least for now. Your juggling will have fewer drops once you simplify your pattern.

Don't stress when interruptions occur (i.e., improvise when the spotlight is on). In the entertainment business, things change on a dime. For example, you may be committed to your daughter's piano recital tomorrow night, but then "The Tonight Show" calls and wants you as a guest for tomorrow. In that case, you may have to drop everything, change your plans and take the lucky breaks as they come. Sometimes during a performance, a juggler may have to improvise and make some changes to his or her routine, while in front of a live audience.

"The Tonight Show" may not be calling you, but last-minute changes like these happen to everyone. For instance, you may set aside your entire morning to finish that big project. Ten minutes into work, you get a call from your child's school saying your son is sick and you have to pick him up immediately. When that happens, accept the interruption and don't get upset. Feeling angry, resentful or annoyed by the disruption, whatever it may be, will only cause you to feel more stress than necessary. Realize that things happen to everyone. Being nimble and able to change gears on a moment's notice will keep you in balance, no matter what happens. And sometimes those improvised moments turn out to be the best part of the show.

#### Keep All Your Balls in the Air

Regardless of your profession or life circumstances, remember that all areas of your life are important, so you need to find a good balance. After all, it doesn't do any good to let your marriage fall apart because you spend too much time at work. Nor does it make sense to get fired from work because you spend too much time at home. You need to allocate the necessary time for fun, family, work, exercise, hobbies and anything else you want in your life, while also being able to let all the unnecessary stuff go.

By finding that much-needed balance between all elements of your life, you'll soon be a master juggler who can handle whatever comes your way.

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