

## **Balancing Your Life**

### **What works for me – by Katryn Wiese**

One of the challenges that I face philosophically in my life is how to balance my need to plan for the future with my desire to live fully and participate today. My strategies for balancing my life take into account both goals, mainly by releasing my mind from the worries of the future and having confidence that I will get everything I need to done. Here are a few of my strategies:

**Organization:** Once I record tasks in a To Do list, they leave my conscious mind (and thus let it relax a bit) and enter my subconscious processing mode. Good work happens in that mode, even while my conscious mind is focused on the activity of the moment. I don't have to worry about forgetting things, and I find that everything gets done. It's satisfying and motivating to see my progress as I cross items off the list.

**Goal setting:** If a project is long term, I break it into short-term goals, so I can feel and show progress.

**Doing things now:** Believe it or not, doing things right away actually saves me time, especially when the task doesn't have a deadline or isn't close to its deadline. My mind is clearer and more active (and in the moment). I have more energy (because I'm not weighed down by impending responsibilities). Getting things off my To Do list and desk sooner than necessary means deadlines don't mysteriously converge for multiple projects, tasks get done, and I get to feel good about their quality. For example, I get quizzes and labs to grade EVERY week, so I grade papers every day – and hence they rarely pile up. Students love it – they get feedback immediately – and I exhibit the same behavior I expect them to follow.

**Standards:** Just like grading students, for most things, an A is an A, whether it was a 90.5% or a 99.5%. With a huge list of tasks, I ensure that I do each one at a high enough quality to pass my own personal A test (90%) – and give up on the perfectionism. Perfectionism, in my world (as in most) is an endless task and hence a time sink.

**Time-saving:** Where possible, I link up activities that can be done together – For example:

- I read books while on the treadmill or exercise bike.
- I listen to books on tape while lifting weights.
- I get multiple people I need/want to see together for a shared activity (instead of having to see each one singly – perfect for peer mentoring or process review).
- I use facilities located closest to my work (on campus) or home to save my time in transit (or work from home, where applicable).
- I have office hours during the lunch hour, so I can eat while helping students.
- I run tutoring hours parallel with my office hours, so that more students can be served.
- I run a mentoring and tutoring program to give my students more opportunities for help and to lighten my load – the result: I'm more patient, and the students feel better about themselves.
- When possible, I limit student access (in other words I'm not available 24/7 – I work away from the official office often, to actually get work done).
- I take classes at City College – in Spanish, Writing, Soccer – conveniently located and an excellent opportunity to learn more about what it's like to be a student at my institution.
- I plan trips for my vacation time that help me improve my courses – I get to the places I want to go, but I get to come back with slides and experiences useful to my courses.

**Priorities:** Finally, the most important thing for me is to have a strong underlying guiding map for all my decisions, and that comes from carefully prioritizing the things in my life. When opportunities arise, I weigh them carefully against my priorities, and that helps me to know when to say No, and when Yes. These are ordered priorities:

#1: My own mental, spiritual, and physical health (I am no good to others, until I've taken care of myself).

#2: My family

#3: My job

- a) The students (yes, they're more important in *my* job than anything else)
- b) My future career desires
- c) My own academic education
- d) My department
- e) The college as a whole

#4: My friends, home, etc.

With these priorities, I can weigh an opportunity, such as a request to help in a workshop or a hike with friends against the items on my ToDo list. I mentally assess if things are going okay with the higher priority items, and if all is at an acceptable level, I can jump into something at a lower priority level. And I plan my week accordingly, making sure there's always enough time to take care of #1 and #2 before #3, 4, etc. For example, physical workouts happen in the morning – before other responsibilities have had time to weigh me down. Thus I first take care of my highest priority every day (my own health) and am less likely to short-change it for something else.

*Note:* my career is *not* my #1 priority, nor will it ever be. I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have found a job that allows me to maintain my life's priorities in a healthy balance.