

Balancing Your Life

Ideas that might help you

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→ **Let's be honest...** if one lists off the responsibilities and hobbies that each of us have and assigns a weekly hourly time that each needs to be fulfilled, then there would need to be 40 hours in every day and 10 days per week. There simply isn't enough time to do well, to a high level of satisfaction, all of the things that one needs to do. There's only one way to deal with this problem successfully: know who you are, know what you want, accept compromise as normal, and make a plan.

→ **Know who you are:** Have you ever really taken time to think about who you are as a person? What motivates you? What makes you happy? Do you need people around you, or are you okay being on your own? What are the most important things in your life right now? Do you think that you will answer differently in 5 years from now? Let's answer some of these questions:

(1) Rank these in importance from 1 (most) to 3:

- varied job environment (teaching, research, service) _____
- leading a successful high-profile research group _____
- a balanced home and work life _____

(2) What 3 things do you *need* to do to keep you happy as a person (e.g., surfing, gardening, etc.)?

- _____
- _____
- _____

(3) Are you motivated enough for an academic position to give up for a time or seriously cut-back on the three things that you listed above? YES NO

(4) How do you best work?

- Quickly and efficiently _____
- Slowly, methodically, but get the job done _____
- Slowly, not so organized, finally get it done _____

(5) How do you cope with relentless low-level stress and tiredness?

- No problem, I laugh at it _____
- I've learned to suck it up _____
- It's okay for a while if I know it's going to end soon _____
- I need a shoulder to cry on _____

→ **Know what you want:** And then work toward that. It's not a good idea to accept a tenure-track position in Kansas or North Dakota if it's the saltwater beach that you need. Think about the things that you want in your career, the lifestyle that you want, and then work toward attaining it. But be honest with yourself. If you know that you don't handle stress very well, then perhaps you shouldn't be leading a large research group or trying to live off soft-money grants. If you need to be on the cutting-edge perhaps you should restrict your job search to large well-funded institutions that attract top-notch graduate students and post-docs. Let's think about this for a little bit because getting these right will help you attain balance in your life:

(6) Geography: strike out the places that you know you can't live in:

- New England
- Middle Atlantic
- The South
- The Midwest
- The Southwest
- The West (south)
- The West (Pacific Northwest)
- Alaska

(7) The best fit for me is (choose one):

- A research only job _____
- A research intensive job with minor teaching _____
- A teaching position with lower research expectations _____
- A teaching position (with or without the research) _____

(8) I could see myself working at a... (choose and rank up to three):

- National laboratory (*e.g.*, Argonne Nat. Lab., Los Alamos, Oak Ridge, *etc.*) _____
- Government or State agency (*e.g.*, NASA, EPA, USGS, *etc.*) _____
- Private liberal arts college _____
- State funded 4-year regional college _____
- Public research university _____
- Private research university _____
- Junior 2-year college or Community College _____

(8) Given my preferences, what do I need to do to be "in the zone":

- Nothing, I nearly have or just got my Ph.D. and I'm ready to go _____
- Get a visiting or sabbatical replacement to get teaching experience _____
- Do a research post-doc _____
- Do a second research post-doc _____

→ Make plans...and stick to them: Now that you have got that job that you wanted, you find that life is out-of-control. Make plans and get control back. Plan your life out at different time scales.

Plan your day.

Plan your week.

Have a plan for the academic year.

Plan the 6 or 7 years from start to tenure.

If you don't control and organize your life, then everything else and everyone else will. Be deliberate and directed. That's what successful people do to be successful. As an indication, these are the things that you need to plan for:

SELF

Exercise
Entertainment
Spirituality

HOME

Spouse and Children
Yard and Home Duties
Vacation

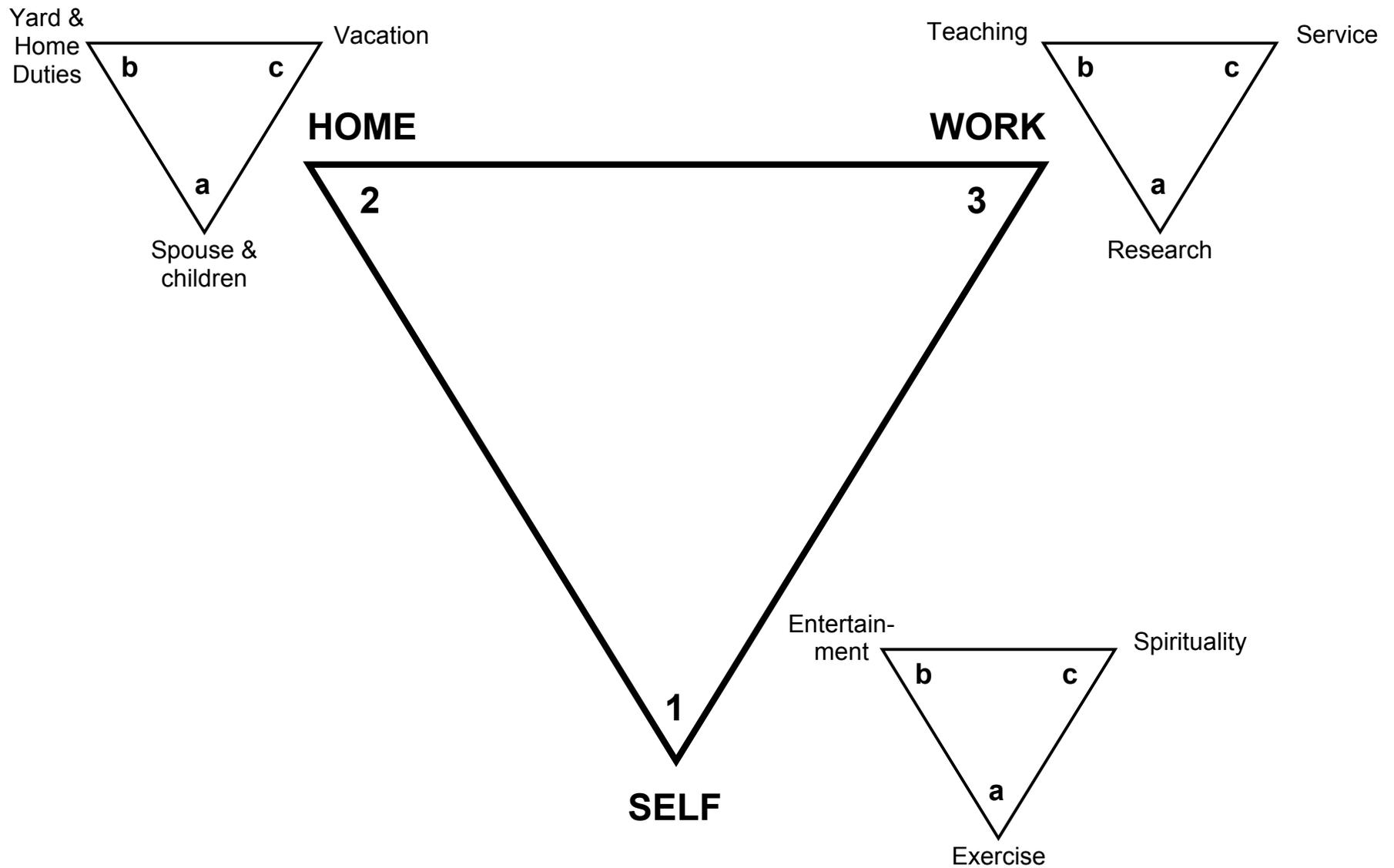
WORK

Research
Teaching
Service

These areas of your life will play-off against each other and will take priority over each other at different times of the day, week, and year. You'll find it helpful if you have a good sense of this play-off and how it works for you. Realize also that satisfaction and success will be attained in different areas at different times.

The sooner you get comfortable with trading priorities off against each other, the sooner you will make time for the most important things. For example, perhaps you decide not to buy a house until you have finished your second post-doc. In this way, you make time for yourself because you probably won't have yard duties to attend to. You might decide not to take 3 weeks of vacation every year, but only every second year until you get tenure. Your Department may only require departmental service (and not Faculty or University-level service) prior to tenure.

I find it helpful to visualize these time-competing areas visually (over page):



(9) Using numbers + letters and names (e.g., 3a, Research), list off your current top 7 time priorities on the left; on the right, anticipate what your time priorities might be when you are two years into the #1 ranked job that you indicated in Question 8:

(i) NOW

(ii) 2-YEARS INTO DREAM JOB

(1) _____

(1) _____

(2) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

(5) _____

(6) _____

(6) _____

(7) _____

(7) _____

(10) Are you happy with your NOW answers given your answer to Question 2? If not, what changes will you make?

(11) Let's say that you have a child in year 4 of your Dream Job. How will your priorities change? Are you prepared to re-order them? For how long?

(12) Think of your current graduate or post-doc advisor. As best as you can, to the right of your answers for Question 9(ii), list using numbers + letters what you think their priorities in life are. How closely do they match what you wrote for 9(ii)? Will you be happy if in 15 years from now your priorities resemble closely those of your advisor? If not, how will you ensure that you will be different...you are both products of the same system, are you not?