

*“Balance”*

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Ask just about anybody what they would like more of in their life and they will answer, “Time.”

Americans hold the dubious global record of Most Hours Worked by any labor force in the industrialized world. We pulled ahead of the Japanese in the mid-1990’s and have never looked back. Americans now work almost a month more than the Japanese do each year, and almost three months more than the Germans, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO).

In addition, as a people we take the shortest vacations of any industrialized nation—the Bureau of Labor Statistics clocks us at just 8.1 days after a year on the job and 10.2 days after three years, as compared to the four-six weeks that the typical European enjoys.

This addiction to busy-ness doesn’t end at the office. Many of us tend to continue the trend at home, over-committing ourselves and our family socially, in various extra-curricular activities and in our community.

We seemed to have morphed from human beings into human doings. How can we reclaim our time?

Two national campaigns are attempting to raise Americans’ consciousness about our own plight. The “Work to Live” campaign is spear-headed by Joe Robinson, author of the book, “Work to Live: The Guide to Getting a Life,” while the “Take Back Your Time” movement is a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy at Cornell University. It launched the first “Take Back Your Time Day” last year on October 24 and is planning another for the same date this year. The organization is holding its National Founding Conference June 10-13 at Loyola University in Chicago.

That’s all well and good, but what can *you* do *today* to start taking back your time? As a holistic lifestyle coach I work on a regular basis to guide people back to reclaiming their time and their life. Many of the strategies I use were born out of my own quest to gain better balance in my life.

The first question I asked myself and that I ask clients is, “If you had more time, how would you spend it?” Ask yourself that question. You might also ask yourself what makes you happiest in your life. Write down your answers. They provide insight into what you truly value in your life. You may also want to jot down the major activities that are taking your time right now. Compare the two lists. If you’re currently not spending

your time where your values are, you're out of alignment with yourself. You're living someone else's life.

To further study your own allocation of time, use the following series of questions to evaluate whether or not the next project, social engagement or activity is worth your precious time:

- Do I absolutely need to do this?
- Do I want to do this?
- Will I have fun/be energized/enjoy doing this?
- Will doing this lead me to something else that I want?

At the very least, this exercise will start making you more conscious of how you are *deciding* to spend your time. Because the fact is, you really do have a choice. Even if it's something you must do, you are still making the *choice* to do it. I find there's less resentment when I remind myself of that.

But if it's something you don't need to do and it's not going to be fun, enjoyable or get you something else you need or want...why are you doing it? Paying careful attention to what you're doing, where you're spending your time and why may assist you in beginning to uncover some unconscious patterns. It may be that saying, "Yes" is simply a habit. Or that it's said to please others. Or that it's said because you haven't thought about how to say, "No."

So many of us are afraid to say, "No." It seems selfish, rude or like a shirking of duty or obligation. But in accommodating everyone else, by mindlessly saying, "Yes," we are robbing ourselves of our time, and ultimately, of a fulfilling life.

If you're spending your time and energy with the people and projects and activities that fill you up, that energize you, that you enjoy, that you value, the issue of time interestingly stops becoming such an issue. I venture it's not more time we all need; it's a more fulfilling *use* of our time.