

BALANCING YOUR LIFE

Then one evening I phoned home to tell the boys I wouldn't make it back in time to say good night. I'd already missed five bedtimes in a row. Sam, the younger of the two, said that was O.K., but asked me to wake him up whenever I got home. I explained that I'd be back so late that he would have gone to sleep long before; it was probably better if I saw him the next morning. But he insisted. I asked him why. He said he just wanted to know I was there, at home. To this day, I can't explain precisely what happened to me at that moment. Yet I suddenly knew I had to leave my job."

The central paradox is this: Most of us are earning more money and living better in material terms than we (or our parents) did a quarter century ago, around the time when some of the technologies on which the new economy is based—the microchip, the personal computer, the Internet—first emerged. You'd think, therefore, that it would be easier, not harder, to attend to the parts of our lives that exist outside paid work. Yet by most measure we're working longer and more frantically than before, and the time and energy left for our non-working lives are evaporating."

Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor, The Future of Success, p. 3, 5

Leaders in the modern era face the significant challenge of finding the right kind of balance in their lives between work, family, self, and other interests. The constantly growing and competing demands of life on many fronts push us all to make daily behavioral decisions about how we spend our time and talents, often without taking the time to think clearly about the consequences of those decisions. Making those decisions without a clear picture of their consequences can be devastating for us all—leaders, managers, and employees.

Some people naturally seem to find a balance that fits them and their own definition of success over the years. Others have a more difficult job of it. Far too many at middle or late middle age find that they are deeply dissatisfied with the way their lives have turned out. Erik Eriksson in *Childhood and Society*, for example, outlined eight ages of human kind each characterized by binary dilemmas. While this is admittedly and primarily a Western approach,

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his eighth stage in which people in their mature years wrestle with feelings of despair or integrity is instructive. His observation is that later in life we see that it's too late basically to change much in our lives and we come to a realization that either life has come together much in the way that we had hoped and dreamed it would (integrity in the sense of integration into a complete whole) OR we realize that life hasn't turned out like we thought it would and since it's too late to change, we begin to despair. Eriksson's assertion is confirmed in the publication of books like *The Failure of Success, Must Success Cost So Much?*, *Career Success/Personal Failure, Workaholics, Work, Family and the Career, Tradeoffs: Executive, Family and Organizational Life* and the former Secretary of Labor's book, *The Future of Success*, quoted above, all of which examine the ways in which our daily, weekly, and yearly choices repeated over and over again structure our lives; sometimes in ways that we later deeply regret. And this is the potential tragedy; to have made those choices without thinking or anticipating their outcomes.

What we can learn from this is not to seek a common "right" balance. Rather, to be aware of our current choices of time and energy allocation and to make adjustments that point us toward our personal definitions of success, and by that I mean success in life, not just "career." The oft-quoted line, "How many of us, on our deathbeds, with our last gasp will breathe, 'If only I had spent more time at the office!'" makes the point. The tragedy lies in making daily decisions that add up over a lifetime to a balance that one realizes, in retrospect, was not what one would have consciously chosen.

This exercise is designed to help you see your current behavioral allocation of time and how that matches up with your personal definition of success. The exercise is built upon some fundamental assumptions:

- We all have a limited, but equal 168 hours per week of time.
- We all have some freedom in choosing how we spend that time.
- We all have some talent to apply to the time we have.
- We all have various dimensions to our lives that we choose, consciously or unconsciously, to develop or ignore.

A list of these dimensions is given in Figure 1. For the most part, we can consider them the "—AL" aspects of life. I've divided them into four broad categories, self, work (professional), family, and society since these are the bins that most people worldwide in my experience mention. Some of the definitions may not be just what you immediately think, so please look at the parenthetical definitions so you'll know what we mean for each dimension. You may be able to think of other dimensions of life that should be added to the list. The point is that, like cut diamonds, there are a number of facets to our lives, and that by choosing to spend time and energy and talent in some areas, we necessarily neglect others. My colleague, Alex Horniman, often declares that "Excellence is a neurotic lifestyle" suggesting that to excel most of us have to focus our time and attention in powerful ways. When we do this consciously, as in the case of an Olympic hopeful athlete, we acknowledge the sacrifice that we are making in other aspects of life and become singular in our focus. Others prefer to have a more rounded lifestyle, and in so doing, may recognize the sacrifice of excellence in any one area. The challenge is to

know what your choices are and what they mean for you. Perhaps this exercise can help.

Figure 1
Balancing Your Life
ASPECTS OF ADULT LIFE

WORK/PROFESSIONAL

PROFESSIONAL (working, earning in career and job)
FINANCIAL (managing money affairs)
MATERIAL (collecting things)
ASSOCIATIONAL (belonging to and working in industry or professional associations)

SELF

INTELLECTUAL (learning, memory, thinking, analysis)
PHYSICAL (exercising)
EMOTIONAL (feeling, sensing, being aware of emotions)
RECREATIONAL (playing)
SPIRITUAL/PHILOSOPHICAL (praying, meditating, communing, reflecting)

FAMILY

MARITAL (with your spouse)
PARENTAL (with your children)
FAMILIAL (with your parents)
SOCIAL (with your friends)

SOCIETY

SOCIETAL (community work)
POLITICAL (political work)
ECCLESIASTICAL (church work)
NEIGHBORHOOD (involved in the neighborhood)

There are several steps to completing the exercise:

1. **Clarify your personal definition of success.** Write it down in the space below. What does it mean to you now to be “successful?” Research shows that one’s definition of success may vary over one’s lifetime, but we need a place to start. You may or may not have thought about this before, so it may take some reflection to clarify what it means to you to be “successful.” Approach this broadly, that is, consider what it means to be successful in **life**, not just your career. It’s your life, only you can live it, and you are the primary shaper of it. What do you want it to be? Try to be specific as you can. “To be happy” may be true, but it’s not very helpful. What will make you happy? The clarity of the definition will make the exercise more powerful for you.

Success is:

Keep your definition where you can refer to it often; revise it as you feel it necessary. For the ship with no destination, any port will do, but the ship with a destination has a course and a purpose to its sailing. You may wish to consider the various aspects in Figure 1 again as you write your personal definition. I liked the comment the famous comedienne, Lily Tomlin, once uttered, “I always wanted to be somebody. Maybe I should have been more specific.”

2. **Assess your current level of development.** On the wheel diagram in Figure 2, (or using a simple Excel spreadsheet on the web site introduced by your instructor), assess your current level of personal development on each dimension. Use a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is completely undeveloped and 10 is perfectly developed, that is, at a world-class level. A “10” on the physical dimension, for example, would be an Olympic medalist; a “1” would be can’t walk around the block comfortably. The zero point is at the center of the diagram. When you have marked your level of development on each dimension, shade in the area of your development across all dimensions. This will produce **your perception** of your life’s developmental balance at this point. You may find the shape of your profile instructive as you think about how it compares with your definition of success. This is the central piece of this exercise.

Secondly, you can draw your goal or target profile on this same Balance Wheel using another color. (Again, the spreadsheet will help you do this easily.) This will help you highlight the gaps in your present level of development.

The definitions in Figure 3 suggest another way of delineating your development. You may wish to keep these definitions in mind as you determine how to assess and shade in your development profile.

3. **Assess your current allocation of time.** Return to the list of aspects of life in Figure 4, and estimate how much time a week you spend on each one. Without reviewing your day planner, just estimate in Column A how much time you spend on each dimension.

If you have time, you may wish to actually keep track of your time for a week. Like our perceptions of our spending habits, our perceptions of how we spend our time do not often match up with the realities. You can use the form in Figure 5 to keep a weekly time diary and then transform your results in Figure 6 to show how much time you spent during the week on each dimension. Then enter the totals in Column B in Figure 4.

As you do this, you will notice that some dimensions overlap, that is, you could be working on more than one dimension at the same time. If you work construction, you are probably getting lots of exercise while you are working. Likewise some aspects of work may involve new learning that stretches your mind intellectually and spending time socially can be emotionally powerful as when you are comforting grieving friends. You might deal with this overlap by first allocating the 168 hours that you have each week to the dominant aspect and then returning to add “shadow hours” in parentheses to indicate time spent elsewhere really had developmental impact in another area. For instance, if you find that your work requires you to be learning (not just repeating what you can already do), you might assess how much of your work time is like that and add that number to the Intellectual box in parentheses. In this way, your week of 168 hours is leveraged; you can assess how rewarding on how many dimensions your time choices are. If you play golf with your peers, for example, you can count that time as recreation, but probably not include any shadow hours in parental time. If you play golf as a family, you could have recreation time and shadow time with marital and parental aspects. You may find it interesting to see how much of your work time has shadow benefits to other aspects of life, that is, are you learning at work? Are you growing socially at work? etc. You may find that you have no time either shadow or otherwise for a particular dimension or that the only time you have for a dimension is shadow time. It may be that your shadow time is not as productive as “hard time” in which your attention and efforts are concentrated. You decide what to include and how effective both hard and shadow times are. When you’re done, you can add up your total hard hours and your shadow hours on the table in Figure 6.

If you don’t have time to do this, (that, too, is interesting—it’s all data) think back on the previous week and try to allocate the time you spent on each dimension. Use Figures 5 and 6 to help you do this and then enter your retrospective look in Column B in Figure 4.

4. **Create a profile of your current time allocation.** There are two ways you can do this. First, you could use the second wheel diagram in Figure 7 to mark and fill in your time allocations. The wheel is the same size and shape as the one in Figure 2, but the scale is now “Five times the hours of time” so that “10” means you spend a 50 hours a week on this dimension. Include your shadow time in this calculation. I realize that some of you may be working 60, 70, 80, or even 90 hours a week. If so, extend your Professional pie segment beyond the outer circle in scale to your current level of work.

An alternative approach here would be to use a spreadsheet graphing program, if you have one, to create a pie chart of how much time you spent on each dimension last week using the data from step 3. The result won't match the format of your developmental profile, but you can use it to compare mentally. (You could also do this by hand using a compass and protractor by drawing a circle and calculating the percentage of time for each dimension (number of hours / 168 * 100) and multiply by 360 to get the number of degrees around the circle for each dimension. For example, if you spent 55 hours working, then $55/168*100 = 33\%$ times 360 degrees = 120 degrees of arc around the circle for that dimension.)

5. **Compare and reflect.** Now, consider the relationships between your definition of success, your goal or target profile, your current self-assessed level of development and your current time allocations. The following questions may help guide your reflection.
 1. What connections do you see? What disparities or gaps?
 2. Are there “flat spots” on either wheel diagram that concern you?
 3. How do they relate to your definition of success and your allocation of time?
 4. Do you want to do anything about them? How much time and talent will it take?
 5. What will be the impact of your current time allocation on your development over the course of your life? That is, where logically does your present time allocation pattern take you 20 or 30 years into the future?

Figure 2
Balancing Your Life
PERSONAL LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT

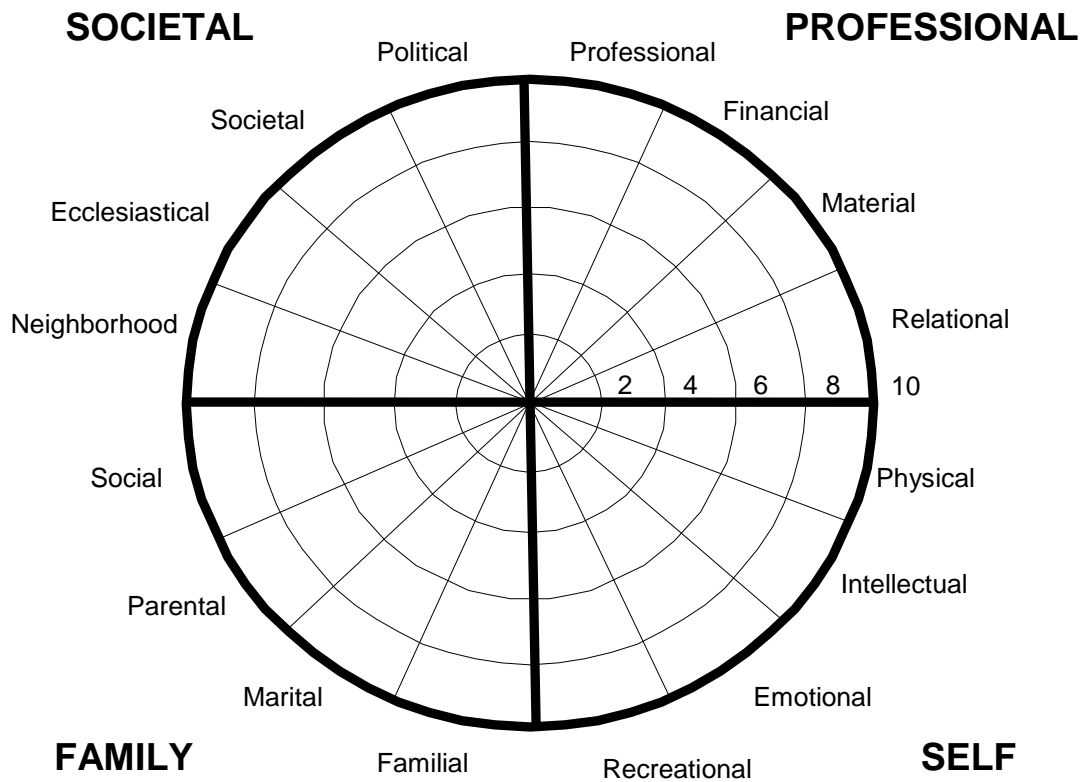


Figure 3
Balancing Your Life
STAGES OF GROWTH

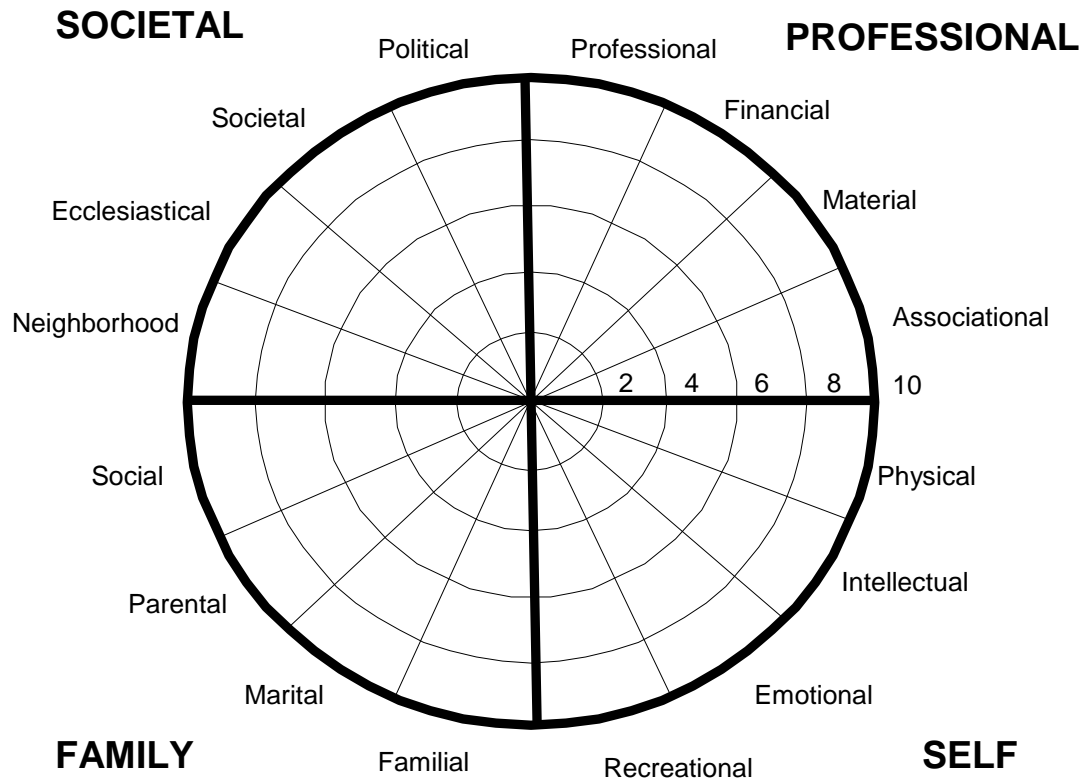
One way of thinking about movement from the center of the diagram or embryonic level of development is in terms of “maturity.” Using the definitions below, you can gauge your development on each dimension. These terms are intended to be descriptive not evaluative.

1. **EMBRYONIC:** Unaware that the dimension exists and therefore pays no attention to it.
2. **YOUTH:** Aware that the dimension exists but does little intentional about developing it.
3. **ADOLESCENT:** Aware that the dimension exists but believes that it can be developed later; therefore, does a little about developing it now and then moves on.
4. **YOUNG ADULT:** Aware that the dimension exists and concerned about developing it; has a superficial awareness that one must work at developing it all along and makes modest efforts to develop it.
5. **MATURE ADULT:** Aware that the dimension exists and concerned about developing it; has a deep awareness of the need to develop the dimension constantly and is working hard to develop it.

Figure 4
Balancing Your Life
PERSONAL ALLOCATION OF TIME

TIME SPENT LAST WEEK		
ASPECT OF LIFE	ESTIMATED	TOTAL (from Figure 6)
PROFESSIONAL		
FINANCIAL		
MATERIAL		
RECREATIONAL		
PHYSICAL		
SLEEP		
INTELLECTUAL		
EMOTIONAL		
SPIRITUAL/PHILOSOPHICAL		
MARITAL		
PARENTAL		
FAMILIAL		
SOCIAL		
SOCIETAL		
POLITICAL		
ECCLESIASTICAL		
TOTAL	(168?)	

Figure 7
Balancing Your Life
TIME SPENT WHEEL DIAGRAM



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