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INTERNATIONAL COACHING NEWS

12th EDITION | PERSONAL COACHING

FEATURE ARTICLE

Life Exchange Rate!
by *Barbara J. Cormack*

COACH TOOLS

**How should coaches
deal with the issue of
WORK LIFE BALANCE?**
by *Malcolm Nicholson*

Seek Harmony Instead of Balance
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Promote Healthy Thinking
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The Work-Life Balancing Act
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THE NUMBER 1 MAGAZINE FOR LIFE AND BUSINESS COACHING

EDITOR'S NOTE



Welcome to yet another exciting edition of the International Coaching News (iCN) online magazine! For our 12th edition our theme is **Personal Coaching**. This edition is loaded with content on a variety of relevant topics on the issues that come with managing people, various leadership and relational styles to improve and enhance relationships and so much more.

The ICN is proud to have collaborated with several renowned international columnists, expert coaches and best-selling authors to provide insights on executive coaching. In this edition look out for our **feature article** from **Barbara J. Cormack** of France '**Life Exchange Rate**', where Barbara teaches us on how to balance between personal life and professional life - the importance of identifying where we are spending our time, need to be spending our time, and want to spend our time. In our Coaching Tools Section '**How should coaches deal with the issue of Work Life Balance?**' by **Malcolm Nicholson** from United Kingdom, highlights tips and techniques that can help leaders and coaches drive or reinforce the changes they want to make to themselves or for their clients. Another noteworthy article is '**Habits and how to break them**' by **Pam Rigden** of the United Kingdom. It is the first article in the series, which covers six key NLP strategies that Coaches can safely use to support clients who want to give up 'bad' habits. '**The Work-Life Balancing Act**' by **Ronita Neal** from Australia draws on concepts that unpack the chemical activity inside our brain that determines our moods and helps to regulate our general functioning.

Each of our columnists, too numerous to mention, have taken some really interesting perspectives, and I would encourage a thorough read-through of this edition.

Just like all our other editions, this edition is not just an interesting read, but it provides you with helpful coaching tools, personal development ideas and professional development techniques to grow your business.

We appreciate your support and look forward to your feedback!

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Lovelie Caracut
Editor, iCN Magazine

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WORK

LIFE

SECTION: COACHING TOOLS

How should coaches deal with the issue of Work Life Balance?

by Malcolm Nicholson (United Kingdom)

What are the pressures that cause leaders put their health and non work life at risk?

Why do so few people see them and even fewer act as examples to a better way of working and living?

Coaches need to be aware of what is making work-life balance such a big issue and have a range of techniques to hand. How big an issue? Well, in market response terms, a simple Google search for 'Work life balance books' brought up 121 million results...

The impact of the external world has been well documented. Global workforces, new entrants who are working for a step change in personal economic status that the west takes for granted, pan-continental trade deals, the way businesses are measured and funded, with their constant need for growth and more for less. This has been exacerbated by 24/7 technology. The technological revolution hasn't finished and we are now at the stage where the enabling technology is a disruptive force, overwhelming us with unrelenting Communication. Just look at the amount of time people spend scanning or sending transactional responses with no depth of thought. "We are already the most over informed, under reflective people in the history of civilization." (Kegan & Lahey).

This all impacts people's internal world. We still have fundamentally the same 'operating system' that helped us evolve from a stone age species; Consequently we have a number of common drivers

that predetermine our responses. These include:- a need for community and a fear of the outsider; a need for security and a fear of death; a need for clarity and a fear of the future; a need for authority and a fear of chaos; a need for respect and a fear of insignificance. (1)

Whilst the operating system hasn't changed, for many people the working environment has changed, dramatically. Traits that were needed to for survival haven't adapted to the new virtual cyber environment. The way we instinctively react to the volume of work will be driven in the main by this hardwiring.

So why the draw to work? Why do we find it so wooing?? Let's not forget that work has always been a socially based activity – from hunting and agrarian economies onwards. We can achieve far more through working with others than we can on our own. It does seem to be in our blood and is based on some pretty deep seated human needs. Much has been written about theories of motivation, which are beyond the remit of this article. Instead, let's look at some ways that work fulfils the needs of Brown's Human Universals listed above.

Firstly of course there is a salary. This provides for the ‘keep alive’ stuff like food and shelter as well as the self actualization stuff like hobbies and holidays. It also provides the social standing stuff like the property and belongings. This feeds into our fear of the future – ‘What if I lost my job – how will I pay for everything?’ and our need for future financial security.

It also provides us with a routine, ‘security’ and social interaction. From that comes status – the company name, the job title, office and all the mayoral chain trappings that go with it as well as the opportunity to gain and exercise power. Kilburg (2) looks at leadership behaviour and how some personality disorders can lead to a need for power.

Work tasks provide varying degrees of mental stimulation, the participation in or completion of which can provide an intrinsic satisfaction.

Some people may achieve altruistic outcomes through their work – and have vulnerable people relying on them. There is also the non-work status as the ‘hunter gatherer’ or provider for dependents. For example, a client from India with whom I worked was saving to open a school in his rural village.

There are also various degrees of the macho alpha male “Lunch is for wimps” approach and being the first in and the last out. Particularly in consultancies or service businesses that have billable hours.

Our identity in the non work environment can feel enhanced by being busy. “We also live in a competitive society, and so by lamenting our overwork and sleep deprivation - even if that requires work week inflation and claiming our worst nights are typical - we show that we are dedicated to our jobs and our families. Being “busy” and “starved for time” is a way to show we matter. Put another way, it makes us feel important.” (3)



Even delegating tasks of substance or importance is difficult for some leaders. Many admit to me that they and their peers are operating at a level below that at which they should be contributing. It’s comforting to oil the tappets in the warmth of the engine room and not be on the freezing bridge. This creates a bottleneck that impacts everyone involved with the organisation.



Some Leaders I have worked with just are not happy in their own skin and so relish the ‘busy-ness’ of task focused activities, where they don’t have to think about inconvenient doubts about who they really are.

This all adds up to an identity, which may be one that is enhanced by work compared to that of the person not in work. Add all this together and it becomes evident that the work satisfies many human needs.

Consequently, we become pretty good at absorbing the pressure of work as it’s loaded on to us, but less so at letting go, going home early or attending a non-work family related appointment. At this point the graphically named ‘Boiling Frog’ syndrome comes into play, where work commitments insidiously ratchet up and up and become our new habits. The energy cost of doing things differently is so high that we don’t bother unless we’re forced. Rarely, without a compelling event, do we take time to ratchet down. Gallwey refers to this as ‘performance Momentum’. (4)



Leaders are making thousands of tiny decisions that are constantly interpreted and implemented by themselves and others.

So, how does the executive coach intervene in such circumstances? Considering we are dealing with some core identity issues which leaders have built up over their careers and may not even be aware of, it's a pretty tall order to impose work – life concepts on successful people such as these. In fact, the executive coach may get in the way with such scurrilous talk!



The eminent author, psychologist and coach Richard Kilburg said:-

“On the whole, the coaches who come at the work of leadership/management from what we could call an adjustment/wellness perspective largely miss the mark with folks on the way up the chain of command and those at the top. Those folks, the ones we should be aimed at as clients in my view, have largely placed work performance and career at the apex of their cognitive, emotional, and social lives. Encouraging them to find “balance” is virtually impossible. What they are truly interested in is finding the sweet spots of expert performance in the various domains they choose. We get in their way when we introduce our ideologies. That said, some of them do burn out or find themselves in life crises with an absence of meaning once they get there. Those folks usually can be aided with some foci on their inner worlds because there is no performance without sacrifice and ignoring the costs along the way can come back to bite them and their loved ones very, very badly.(5) ”

In my own practice over 16 years I have certainly come across many such individuals. If leaders/clients are fulfilled through their work, who are we as coaches to question that?

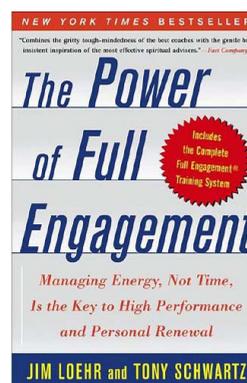
There is, as ever, a spectrum of different individual requirements that coaches encounter. As a result coaches could be complicit with their client if they did not at least question and probe such issues. This is where the experienced coach can, like a jazz musician, discard the ‘toolkit’ and intuitively use their deep knowledge to create a ‘real time’ coaching conversation to tease out any underlying ‘baggage’ or unresolved issues. Probe, test, feedback.



The coach needs to keep their saw sharpened. On the basis that only complexity can absorb complexity, coaches need to have an appreciation that is equal to or greater than the issues facing their clients. Developing access to expert thinking, be it from courses, self development, supervision or knowledge sharing is important to keep the coaching approaches fresh.

So how does the coach add value around work-life balance?

At a meta-level, as Richard Kilburg said, helping leaders do what they do better ‘in the role’ may be the most appropriate approach for them and the business. They may benefit from receiving feedback or increasing awareness about the impact they as a leader are having on a business and working through it.



An interesting cross disciplinary approach comes from Tony Schwartz and associates who talk of managing our energy not our time - as opposed to working flat out from dawn till dusk and beyond. His book ‘The Power of Full Engagement’ is a number one best seller on business book lists. (6)

The constant increase in external pressure on the working environment means the role of coaches often starts with creating space to probe and explore the individual constructs around the work – life balance space. Working life can be seen as a set of beliefs (a construct) that is also made up of choices. Work can be approached as sequential episodes or chapters in a person’s life, in which leaders can reflect, gain learning and insights and greater understanding, ready for the next chapter. This should be about themselves, the impact they have and the requirements of their people. Yes, there will be periods of heavy workload, but greater awareness enables people to ratchet down when appropriate and not constantly up. The culture an organisation possesses is a construct and one driven significantly by those in charge.

Looking forward, the requirement to flex down as well as up is likely to increase as Generation Y become more embedded in the working population. Instead of working long shifts to work their way up an organisation the millennial generation prefers flexible working schedules and a more rounded work/life balance...family life takes priority over the workplace. Many Generation Y’s have grown up with overworked parents and this has driven the new perception to work. (7)



Finally, at a pragmatic level, some simple tools & techniques can help leaders drive or reinforce the changes they want to make. See the sidebar ‘Work-Life Coaching Tips’ for some simple techniques to feed into the process.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE COACHING TIPS

The following are some ideas to add to coaches existing repertoire. They aren’t exhaustive but have proved very useful both to clients and myself. A senior business development executive thanked me and told me he had got back 25% of his working week by using some of the following:-

What are the ‘must do’, ‘would like to do’ and ‘could do’ items? Build the ‘must do’ non work activities (which will never happen again – like family school events) into the diary.

Accept the situation. Freud said that imbalance is part of the human condition. If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing properly. Be present where ever you are and give the situation your full investment of attention, focus and energy.

No is the new Yes. Don’t take on things that aren’t your responsibility or won’t in the, longer term, benefit your career.

When possible, make others demands fit in with your schedule. Push back timings – most will be a discretionary figure.

Be smarter and more ruthless with your time.

Don’t be a perfectionist. There certainly isn’t time for it in today’s environment. Beside which, most people will only scan your work anyway!

Beware the ‘smell of burning Martyr’. Catch yourself or other’s saying that it’s only they who can do a job and if it wasn’t for them this place would fall apart.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE COACHING TIPS

Apply the 5 'D's law to anything that comes your way:-

- **Delete it**
- **Delay it**
- **Delegate it**

Then, and only then...

- **Do it**

But make sure you are putting time constraints on it to...

-Diminish it. Be aware of the types of tasks, issues or opportunities that beguile you and pull you into the weeds.

Create some reflective time each week. A sadly lacking commodity in the current business environment. Even if it's the journey to and from work, make some time to reflect – on the past, today and future. Look at what and how you need to get achieved. What impact do you want to have?

Match your contribution level to your role. Keep on the bridge not the engine room.

Career bests happen when people work hard, work as a team, learn and are made to feel valued. Part of 'feel valued' is providing the support and latitude to allow for non-work time.

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ABOUT MALCOLM NICHOLSON:

Malcolm is the owner and Coaching Director for Aspecture, and has worked successfully with a wide range of senior business people for over 15 years, enabling them to improve business results through transformational changes. (see www.aspecture.com). To find out how he can help your organization contact him at malcolmnicholson@aspecture.com or on +44 1932 267597.