

R. Paul Stevens Marketplace Lectures  
**Breaking the Myth of Work-Life Balance:  
Living an *Unbalanced* Life Graciously**

Sponsored by Vocatio Creation in partnership with  
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**A Five Minute Quiz** (*The Office Journal*, June and July 2006)

Rate yourself:           1 - Never  
                                  2 - Seldom  
                                  3 - Sometimes  
                                  4 - Often  
                                  5 - Always

1. I spend 50 hours or more a week at work.
2. I neglect/have difficulty getting an adequate quantity and quality of sleep, exercise, hydration and/or nutrition.
3. I feel depressed, exhausted and/or overwhelmed when I think of all I have to do at home and/or work.
4. I feel like having little or no control over the demands placed on me at home and/or work.
5. I feel guilty that I am not meeting my responsibilities at home and/or work.
6. I neglect taking time for myself (for recreation, relaxation, quiet time or self-care) in favour of fulfilling work and family responsibilities.

24-30	Meltdown waiting to happen
15-23	Getting caught in the thrill of the chase
14 or less	Great, but will it last?

**I. Busyness: Overwhelming Living**

A. Signs of Busyness

1. Full calendars
2. Professionalization of childhood
3. Working longer and harder
4. More things and more encumbrances
5. Increasing complexity and regulation of corporate life (Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life*)
6. Guilt feelings when not doing something

B. Sources of Busyness

1. The escalating demands of technology

2. Global competition in the workplace
3. Pervasive consumerism
4. Information overload
5. Men and women working outside the home
6. Drivenness within (need to establish one's identity through performance)

## II. Stress and Why the Balanced Life Is Hard to Attain

### A. Causes of Stress

1. Shifts in work world
2. Technology
3. Relational pressures
4. One continuous work week
5. Cultural changes
6. Ethical relativism
7. The global economy
8. Drivenness within

### B. Drivenness (Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering your Private World*, 31-36)

1. Gratified only by accomplishment
2. Preoccupied with the symbols of accomplishment
3. Caught in the uncontrolled pursuit of expansion
4. Limited regard for integrity
5. Possess limited or undeveloped people skills
6. Highly competitive
7. Often possesses a volcanic force of anger
8. Usually abnormally busy

## III. Balance or a Juggling Act?

“The truth is, balance is a bunk. It is an unattainable pipe dream, a vain artifice that offers mostly rhetorical solutions to problems of logistics and economics. The quest for balance between work and life, as we’ve come to think of it, isn’t just a losing proposition; it’s a hurtful, destructive one.” (Keith H. Hammonds, ‘Balance Is Bunk!’ *Fast Company* 87, October 2004; downloadable at [www.fastcompany.com/magazine/87/balance-1.html](http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/87/balance-1.html))

“Balance will not be real if it takes the form of private restoration outside of work (as important as that may be). The key is to make work itself a balancing reality, a melting pot for all human needs and capacities. The same applies to personal spirituality. Unless the encounter with transcendence infiltrates work – transforms its aims, outcome and possibilities – we are not really integrating presence but more compensating for its disintegration.” (John Dalla Costa, *Magnificence at Work*, 34)

“Life is about setting priorities and making trade-offs; that’s what grown-ups do. But in our all-or-nothing culture, resorting to those sorts of decisions is too often seen as a kind of

failure. Seeking balance, we strive for achievement everywhere, all the time – and we feel guilty and stressed out when, inevitably, we fall short.” (Hammonds, ‘Balance Is Bunk!’)

“Few saints or mystics speak glowingly of equilibrium. Instead they experience white-hot passion for different priorities, not so much taming excessiveness as giving it over as offering and response to transcendence. . . .The mutual flourishing of contemplation and action inevitably involves ‘doing differently’ rather than ‘doing less’. This is never without tension.” (Costa, 149)

#### **IV. Priorities: A List or a Web?**

WHY? We have a comprehensive calling:

- A. Called to communion with God (Sabbath, prayer)
- B. Called to build community (family, neighbours, workplace, nation)
- C. Called to embellish human life and develop the potential of creation
- D. Called to invest in and enrich heaven

#### **V. An Approach to the Disciplined Life**

- A. Who Am I?
  - 1. Strengths
  - 2. Personality
  - 3. Talents
  - 4. Spiritual gifts
  - 5. Weaknesses and dysfunctionalities
  - 6. Central motivation – passions
- B. Where Am I?
  - 1. Family background and foreground (genogram)
  - 2. Relationships and interdependencies
  - 3. Geographical location
  - 4. Life Stages
- C. What Am I about? (from Walter Wright)
  - 1. What is the single most important thing in your life to you?
  - 2. What do you want your life to be about?
  - 3. At this point in your life what do you want to learn next?
- D. Values
  - 1. Values you cherish
  - 2. How these values would look in your life?

## **VI. Leaning into the Tension**

- A. See God in all of it
- B. Treat it as a spiritual discipline
- C. Sleep faith-fully
- D. Plan ahead for important things
- E. Recognize there will be seasons
- F. The Inductive Approach to Time (Eccl 3:1-11)
  - 1. We experience time in seasons (3:1-8)
  - 2. This is not an endless round without inner coherence or sense (3:11)
  - 3. Time, like work, is an evangelist to take us beyond the present to recognize that we are being sought by God (3:11)
- G. Spirituality of Time
  - 1. Time is a gift of God
  - 2. We are stewards entrusted with time but not owning it, and accountable to God for our stewardship
  - 3. We have enough time
- H. Say no
- I. Keep Sabbath

## **VII. Other Spiritual Practices**

- A. The Examen (adapted from Ignatius Loyola) – particularly helpful when practised at the end of the day (Tim Muldoon, *The Ignatian Workout: Daily Spiritual Exercises for a Healthy Faith*, 42-43)
  - 1. Place yourself in God's presence
  - 2. For what moment today am I most grateful?
  - 3. For what moment today am I least grateful?
  - 4. Review your day slowly
  - 5. What are you thankful for?
  - 6. What do you regret?
  - 7. What patterns do you see over the last day, week, month, or year?
  - 8. What do these patterns tell you about your relationship to God?
  - 9. Take your observations into prayer, telling everything to God and asking God for understanding. Allow God to move you – and to surprise you, if necessary

B. Developing a Rule of Life (Adapted from M. Basil Pennington, *A School of Love: The Cistercian Way to Holiness*, 93)

1. Pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance and insight
2. List all the things you really want
3. List all the things you need and what you do to attain these
4. What in the past few months has been keeping me from doing what I want to do, and getting what I want to get?
5. Formulate a programme for yourself on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. You will discover that all you want won't fit into a 24 hour day or a seven day week. Here you must make choices. What are the good things you must say 'no' to in order to say 'yes' to something better? (meeting with a spiritual director may help)

C. The Thrive Test (Adapted from Kyosei Consulting, [www.kyoseiconsulting.com](http://www.kyoseiconsulting.com))

1. I understand my values and consistently use them to guide my choices in life and work.
2. I understand my strengths and use them on a daily basis to energize myself and accomplish my goals/tasks with maximum effectiveness, efficiency and enjoyment.
3. I have a clear sense of purpose that I connect with on a daily basis to focus and energize my work and to bring meaning to all areas of my life.
4. I have a clear vision for my life, work and family and see myself steadily moving towards it.
5. I am conscious of my needs and am able to create strategies to meet my needs in ways that align with my values, strengths, purpose and vision.

“The Bible tells us that the Christian is in the world, and that there he or she must remain...Some try to disconnect the spiritual life from the material one. Ellul says, others moralize and ‘Christianize’ life in the marketplace ‘covering it up with an ethical glaze.’ Yet we cannot deny the tension: we live in a sinful world and we cannot change it, or at least not much; at the same time we cannot accept it as it is. He has sent us into the world, and just as we are involved in the tension between sin and grace, so also we are involved in the tension between these two very contradictory demands. It is a very painful, and a very uncomfortable, situation, but it is the only position which can be fruitful for the action of the Christian in the world, and for his [sic] life in the world...We must accept - in a spirit of repentance – the fact that our life in the world is necessarily ‘scandalous’...To be honest, we must not accept this tension of the Christian, or of the Christian life, as an abstract truth. It must be *lived*, it must be realized, in the most concrete and living way possible.” (Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* [trans. Olive Wyon], 7, 17, italics his)