

## Balance Work and Fitness – Part 2: A Winning Approach

A quote from Ryan Holiday on Practicing the Disciplines for Growth: "We have to struggle in just about every moment of every day to make good choices. From the moment we're first awake: Get up or snooze the alarm? Go for a run or back to bed? Do the deep work or go down a deep Twitter rabbit hole? Make ourselves lunch or order Grubhub? Go to the gym or to a happy hour? Get a good night's sleep or watch another episode? It's these choices that add up to make you, you. You are the sum of one small choice stacked upon one small choice stacked upon one small choice, *ad infinitum*. If your life were a painting, these choices would be the brushstrokes that compose it. In other words, your life is defined by your choices, *by your discipline*. Which is why, as we have said recently, *discipline is destiny*." - Ryan Holiday

In the last episode of the TD Fitness Podcast, Part 1 of my three-part series on Balancing Work and Fitness, I discussed the mindset required to balance the two...having an understanding of the type of person you want to become, belief that you can be that person, knowing your 'why,' and getting out of your own way. We'll continue the discussion in this episode with some of the next steps - the practical approaches to actually balancing your work life and your health.

It's somewhat ironic that as I started to draft this episode on balancing work in early September, it was right around Labor Day. A day set aside to honor the work of the labor force. A day that is now a national holiday and intended to be a day of rest. It's also ironic that my work schedule over the past few weeks has prevented me from getting this episode out sooner. But I think it speaks well to the topic at hand. That life is all about balancing priorities. Whether we're talking about work and fitness, or any of the other examples from our opening quote by Ryan Holiday. It's always about some sort of balance that we hope to achieve. Because the truth is that we can't be too one-sided. Shaquille O'Neal was a great basketball player but struggled at the free throw line. Golfers who can drive the ball a mile still need to have a short game. It's no different with work and play. Ultimately this is about your health. Whether you really enjoy work or you feel like you have to spend a considerable amount of time working, it has to be balanced with fitness and the other things that will keep you healthy. Otherwise, it's unhealthy.

Where I always start the discussion on your approach, the practices and disciplines required to reach your goals, which in this case is to strike a healthy balance between work and fitness, is with an understanding of whether now is a good time to move out on your goal to get better. Let's be honest, sometimes we just don't have it in us to undertake a tasking like this. And sometimes the things going on around us can prevent us from reaching our goals despite our best efforts. When it comes to balancing work and fitness, I often come back to the first verse in chapter 3 of the book of Ecclesiastes. "For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven." This means that some times are better than others to undertake a task like reducing your workload and devoting more time to fitness.

That said, my belief, especially in today's society, is that almost everyone is overworked, either due to internal or external factors. So, we'll proceed with an understanding that, yes, there may be certain times or seasons when you must devote more time to work, but generally speaking, we could all use a bit more balance in our lives.

Another thing to consider is your actual readiness for change...at an individual level. Do you really believe you need to get better at balancing work and fitness? Or is it just me suggesting that you do so? This could really get into a lot of how we think about work. Our relationship with work, especially if you're a driven individual, can be all-consuming and addicting. Perhaps because our work is oftentimes a place where we can actually see the fruits of our labor almost immediately. I checked all of my emails, now my inbox is almost empty. I got this project across the goal line, now I have a sense of accomplishment. Or, I worked this many more hours this week...now I see more money in my paycheck.

But here's what I'd ask you to consider. Do you have to be this busy working? If so, what should "busy" actually look like? What *could* it look like? Do you live to work or do you work to live life? Do you need to work longer to make more money or to live a happier life? Perhaps by trying to streamline the hours spent working you can create the life that you love. Now, I understand that there are differences between different jobs, pay rates, and all of that. But the point here is to get you thinking about why you do what you do. If you could look at how all of your time was spent or divided over the last year between work, family, fitness, leisure, sleep, socialization and all of the other things that we do, would you be happy with the way things were broken down? Your time is your currency. Do you spend it wisely? Does it reflect what you say are the important things in your life?

If you were able to see everything, by category, that takes up your time, what are the must dos? What are the should dos? What are the nice to dos and what are the unnecessary things? It's a useful exercise. But the point is that you need to assess your readiness for change. And this starts with having a healthy and truthful understanding of what work means to you in relation to the other important things in life, such as your health and fitness.

Not too long ago, I attended a church service where the topic was work life balance. And one of the questions asked was this, "how do you know if you are burnt out?" And the answer that the pastor proposed is that you know you're burnt out when things get "NUTS." And "NUTS" in this case is an acronym for negative, unfocused, tired, or stressed. Are things getting NUTS in your world? Do you find yourself being more negative? Are you unfocused, or tired? Are you more stressed? These are indications that things are out of balance!

Now, I know that sometimes you don't have much control over work schedules or how busy the season is. But I'd offer that oftentimes, you have more time than you think in your daily schedule. And perhaps you can be more efficient in using your time. If you remember the example from my previous series on reaching your fitness goals, I found a way to train for a full Ironman while I was employed in the busiest job of my life to that point. I did it by utilizing the margins, and by deciding what I *wasn't* going to do, just as much as I had to decide what I was going to do.

The point here is that, yes, you may feel busy with work without an option to change that. Perhaps you truly are busy and committed to work without any flexibility to adjust the amount you work. But have you asked yourself the question? Are you hitting the "easy" button and just trudging along waiting for things to change? Or are you in control of your life, and willing to take steps needed to be more balanced? There's a difference between waiting for the right time, and avoiding what you should probably do right now. Only you know the answer to the situation you're currently in.

Sometimes I try to zoom out and I can't help but chuckle, because we are all both creatures of habit and products of our environment. Many of us continue to work ourselves to death just out of habit. And I don't say that lightly because in many ways that's literally what you're doing - working yourself to death - especially if you're constantly prioritizing work over health and fitness. Or, we simply do what we see those around us doing. Everyone else works long hours, so I feel like I should as well. Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that I'm not everyone else. I'm me...with my own set of priorities. And for Coach T, my family and my health are important...too important for me to work my life away at the expense of those other important things. So, my advice and reminder to you is this - Don't let them do it to you. Don't let your peers dictate your "right" or "normal." Don't let society dictate what's right for you. Be your own person. Live your own life. Perhaps they're all waiting for someone to set the example that they know they should follow. Why can't that example be you?

It's probably worth a reminder here that we're talking about balance, not all or nothing. I'm not telling you to quit your job to go try to be a professional athlete. I'm saying you could probably stand to leave work a half hour earlier than you have been (which is probably still beyond a full work day), and go for a walk, or to the gym, or to run around with the kids. If it's not in the evening, maybe it's in the morning or maybe it's breaking away for lunch. You have to find your time and play to your strengths. My time is in the morning. I have more motivation then (physiologically, most people do), and I know that if I try to exercise after work, it probably won't happen. When is your time? When are you at your best? When can you devote some time to movement? Perhaps you're already doing a bit of this. If so, how can you build on it? How can you do the things that you do well, even better?

You may have heard me talk about the Three P's to making a habit consistent. Plan, prioritize, and practice. The goal is to build better habits. Habits are the building blocks. A lifestyle is made up of behaviors. Behaviors are defined by the actions you take. Repeated actions are habits. So, habits are key. They define who we are, and as Ryan Holiday said, they determine your destiny.

So, my plan for fitness in my life is to focus on three areas: Exercise and movement, mobility and stretching, and rest and recovery. Each is important, and I make each fit into my schedule. For me, my exercise and mobility work is almost always in the morning when I wake up. I get up rather early (which requires the discipline to go to bed the night before, by the way), and I take a little bit of time to get a quick workout. Usually, it's a couple of sets of calisthenics on each weekday, and either about a half hour of cardio, or of stretching, or a short core routine. On most weekends I may do a little bit longer cardio because I know that exercise can compound the positive effects of lifestyle change. That's what works for me, but you have to determine what works for you. And it may take some playing around with. I also try to make sure I get plenty of rest and recovery, both through sleep and by scheduling weekly workouts in a way that I have rest or stretch days between the cardio days.

Some things to remember that will help you plan to be consistent in your habits are to:

1. Set your environment for success. This means everyone from the people around you that either support you or distract you, to the things you keep in your house, how you lay out your exercise gear, and overcome obstacles.
2. Do something you like, not something that's boring or that you despise. Consistency is the main thing here, so you want to do things that you feel like you can stick with. Either because they're enjoyable, or because they're so short that you can tolerate them.
3. Define your path. You know what's realistic for you. You know what you can focus on improving. You don't have to be a personal trainer or health coach to live a healthier life. Trust yourself.

Now, once you have a plan, then you can set some priorities, the second "P" in being consistent. Prioritization is at the heart of balancing demands. And honestly, here's where things can get a little bit tricky...especially for those of us who are in what I call servant roles. I serve in the military. I feel that it's a higher calling. I think about teachers, or pastors, or those in medical professions or first responders. There are so many servant roles, well beyond these few that I'm mentioning here, and they're far beyond just the traditional roles. But servants often feel compelled to think that more work is better. I have thought this way many times. I mean, we're doing good work, for example. "People need us," we think. It's for a higher purpose. Well, here's how I see it. If the level of our servanthood is proportional to the amount that you and I should work, then that would imply that the Pope never sleeps. Or that the President should never take time off.

In another quote from Ryan Holiday, he says, "In a way, overwork is selfish (no matter how much the workaholic claims they are doing it for other people). Because it deprives them and the world of that later fertility. It causes needless breakdown and injury." <https://dailystoic.com/go-out-and-live-today/>

Did you know that many countries in Europe, have passed specific legislation on what's called the "Right to disconnect." This is a law that refers to a worker's right to be able to disengage from work and refrain from engaging in work-related electronic communications such as emails or other messages, during non-work hours. How ironic is it that laws need to be passed to make this socially acceptable? And I'm not knocking the EU...we need the same thing in the US! But it's another example of how consumed we've all become with...working and overwork.

In that same church sermon that I referred to earlier about going "NUTS," the pastor also offered a way to beat burnout. He said to find your fit and just say no. He went on to say that your fit is when talent, passion and opportunity meet. And he offered that you may have to say no to a good thing in order to say yes to the best thing.

I think these are good words to remember as we prioritize in our own lives. Because prioritizing is just as much about choosing what you won't do as it is about choosing what you will do. So, here's what I'd offer to help with prioritization:

- Choose one or two priorities. If everything is a priority, nothing's a priority. You can't do it all, so what will you focus on? What will you ignore?
- Remember that it's not all or nothing. You can be better at fitness by simply dialing back a little at work.
- Remember that time is a resource...one that everyone gets the same amount of. It all comes down to how you manage it. How you spend your time will either increase or decrease risk in different areas of your life.

The final "P," after planning and prioritizing, is practicing your habits consistently. One thing I like to say is to just try to be better. Don't try to be perfect. It's about being consistent over time. It's not about being perfect all the time. In fact, I often plan for [quote] "imperfection." I plan for days in the week when I won't exercise. I plan for days of the week when I will have to work longer hours. It's ok to build in that slack. Remember it's your life. And while no day or week may be a perfect representation of your priorities, when you look back over a month or a year, for example, you can see that maybe you exercised more often than you had in the previous period. Or that you worked a little less and bought back some time to do other things in life.

In putting these principles into practice, I also try to remember that small steps are important. Long-term changes start with small steps and develop through consistency. There's a snowball effect of consistency on success. If you can't carve out 20 minutes, how about 10? How about five?

The final thing I'll leave you with on practicing a more effective balance between work and your health, is this - don't underestimate the power of accountability mechanisms. There are those around you who can speak truth to you. Sometimes you just need to listen. You can also start to compare the amount you work from week to week, and track the amount of fitness or movement activity you perform from one week to the next. This can provide powerful insight into what you think you're doing and how you're actually doing.

Now, in summary, I'll ask a couple of simple questions. What kind of lifestyle are you living now? Are you effectively balancing work and your long-term health? If not, what's your next step? Hopefully this episode has been helpful in allowing you to think more about your readiness to change, the timing of your goals to better balance the important things in life, and some ways to plan, prioritize and practice the things that are truly important.

And if that's the case, if this has been helpful to you, I'd encourage you to share this episode with others. You can also download my free single page resource to building a winning approach to reach your goal. Finally, I'd really appreciate it if you could like this, leave a rating or comment. I use that feedback to try to make each of these episodes better for you.

In closing, the takeaway - disciplines matter. And you have to practice them to reach your goals. That's it for this episode. Thank you for listening, have a blessed one, Coach T. out.