

Introduction

Balance is the internal experience of feeling whole and integrated. We feel a sense of harmony within and with our immediate environment. Because our lives are complicated and made up of multiple roles and responsibilities, it is often a daunting, if not impossible task, to consistently keep our lives in balance. For most of us the state of equilibrium is fleeting and hard to capture on command.

As a psychologist and coach, mother of two teenagers, and one energetic Portuguese Waterdog, I can tell you that the idea of achieving balance has been a challenge for me. Raising my children, coaching clients, nurturing my marriage, maintaining my home and keeping up relationships with friends and family often feels lopsided in one way or another.

Throughout our lives we juggle many roles. The idea is not to perform our responsibilities perfectly. Going for perfection is a guaranteed setup for failure. We are all works in progress and need to recognize when things are off kilter, so that changes can be made.

For the past thirty years I have worked with women facing a wide range of struggles, who are trying to achieve balance in their lives. I have repeatedly observed that women do best when we learn balancing strategies and get the support we need from other women.



Multiple Roles of Women

Some of us grew up during a time when women fought bitterly for equality in the work force. We were no longer willing to be held captive in our homes, at least those of us who wanted parity in our professions. The challenge for many was we still held dear the dream of having a family. In the end we were moms taking care of our children, our partners, our homes and our jobs. The thought, “Be careful what you wish for because you just might get it,” has crossed my mind, even though I’m not sure what I would have given up.

Many of the women I know end up with more work than they bargain for. There is often the judgment that you are not putting yourself fully into your family if you work or you are not putting yourself fully into your work if you have a family. The pressure today to be high achieving in the work force and/or a traditional mom often creates feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

Women in our culture seem to inevitably feel like they are not doing enough, regardless of what path they choose. As we attempt to juggle being daughters, sisters, mothers, partners, workers, homemakers – we need to find a way to be true to ourselves about what feels most important. The challenge is to incorporate the activities we must do with the activities that we want to do for ourselves. Then, regardless of how hectic our lives become, we feel that we are living authentically and tapping into what is closest to our hearts.



Multiple Roles of Women continued



There may be times when it makes perfect sense to be more heavily weighted in one area of our lives than another, like when we fall in love, have a baby, build a business, take on a new job, or care for an aging parent. Finding balance is an ongoing process that shifts as we move through our lives. We have to re-evaluate and re-adjust what the right balance is for us at any particular phase of our lives. By learning and using the tools and strategies - what I call the keys - that best support us we have the opportunity to live fully, genuinely and happily.

When we align ourselves with our goals and dreams our lives immediately become more harmonious and fulfilling. The point is to be true to your inner self about what is really important and to move your life in that direction.

Moving Towards Balance



Practicing strategies for gaining balance in work, love and fun increases the odds that our equilibrium that will last for longer stretches of time.

The point is to employ as much of what we know makes a difference and integrate those keys into our relationships, work lives and leisure time. Because life is full of surprises, we have to remain flexible. The goal is to get back into the routine that best supports feeling good, if not great. Building in these keys can powerfully effect daily life experiences. By moving towards balance, we feel more joyful and energized in all areas of our lives.

One more thought before revealing the 10 Keys...

Many of us grew up believing that we could have it all. We learned the hard way that the fantasy of having it all invariably leads to disappointment and burn out. It's helpful to know that perfection in life is an illusion, a set up for frustration and feelings of failure. The idea in finding balance is to create your best possible life, which psychologists call your 'good enough' life.

When we pay close attention to what is out of balance, it becomes easier to figure out what needs to happen to move us closer to equilibrium and the discovery of our truest selves. Making conscious choices that reflect our priorities and values on a daily basis is a powerful way to live. Everyday we face challenges. Finding the way to be in the present moment is one of the keys to resilience and equilibrium.

Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Connect with friends and family members who lift your spirits.

On top of the list of all the things that you can possibly do to create a feeling of balance is connecting with people that you care about. A brief visit or a phone call, even an e-mail with someone important in your world can give you just the lift you need to make a mediocre day into a great one.

Investing regular time with your partner, your children and those in your inner circle is the best way to nourish these relationships and keep yourself vibrant and fulfilled. Keep in mind that women who have active sex lives are healthier and happier than their non-active counterparts.

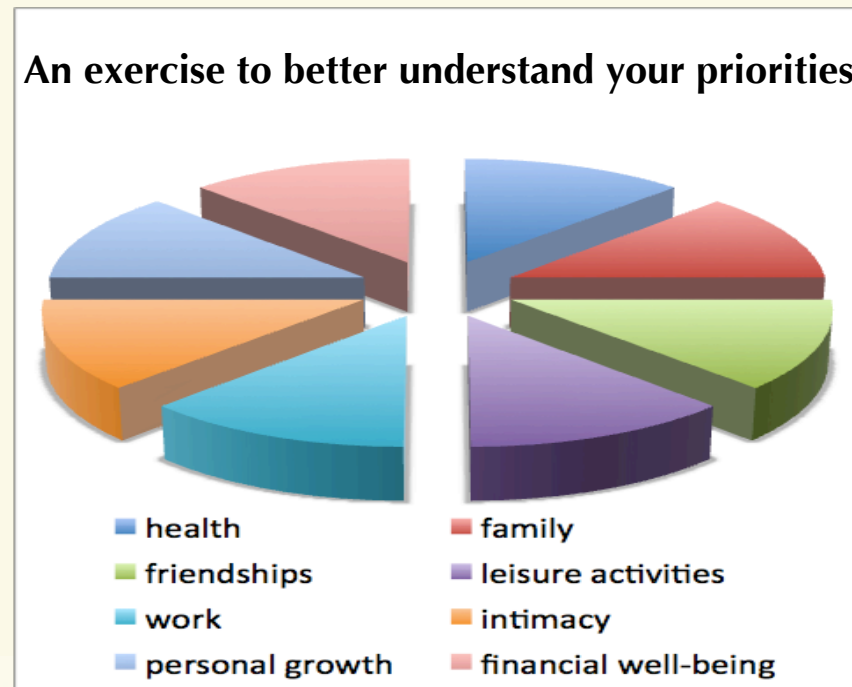
Authentic connections make us feel calm, centered, energized and happy. Also, enlisting the help of friends, family and colleagues helps lighten our load and allows us to feel more comforted and enlivened. Connections positively influence our experience of feeling balanced and whole.



Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Focus on priorities.

Focusing on priorities requires a conscious awareness of what we most value personally and professionally. Having clarity about goals and dreams puts us in a better position to live our lives more fully. Writing down your goals for the coming year and posting it someplace visible is an extra reminder to stay focused on your intentions.



- Draw a large pie on a blank sheet of paper and divide it into slices. Each slice represents an aspect of your life.
- Make a list of 8–10 aspects and then label each slice accordingly. For example: family, friendships, work, health, personal growth, leisure activities, intimacy, money, cultural activities, creativity, travel, etc.
- Place a small dot on each slice that most closely approximates your level of satisfaction in that area. The outer edge of the circle indicates the highest level of satisfaction and the center of the circle indicates the lowest.
- Now connect the dots and notice the shape you created. Is it full and round? Is it jagged and uneven? Notice results.

Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Focus on priorities... continued

You may observe there is a lack of symmetry. The opportunity in drawing this diagram is to notice which areas of your life are getting disproportionate amounts of attention.

Balancing one's life means focusing on the "pie" as a whole and integrated system. When you raise your awareness of which parts are strong and which parts are neglected, you are positioning yourself to make the changes that will bring you to a more balanced state. It may mean adding more time with friends or an exercise class into your schedule.

But remember, it's impossible to attend to all of these areas on a daily basis. The aim is to raise your level of consciousness so that you can begin to incorporate some small changes – one baby step at a time.



Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Create daily rituals.

Practicing rituals convey to the message centers of the brain a sense of calm, organization, comfort and control. This fosters the feeling of balance.

Integrate healthy routines into your everyday life. Build into your schedule rituals or routines such as exercise, meditation, keeping a gratitude journal, eating healthfully and spending time with friends. Short, frequent relaxation breaks throughout the day help to rejuvenate and heighten your energy and creativity.



Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Two examples of daily rituals

Meditation as a ritual

Sometimes just the act of sitting quietly for a few minutes helps to calm and rejuvenate the body and develops greater clarity and concentration. Meditation is one simple and powerful way to settle down the mind and body. The benefits derived from this practice have enormous implications for your psychological and physical health.

A brief meditation technique begins with sitting comfortably in a quiet environment. Now minimize outside interferences. Pay attention to the rise and fall of your breath. Repeat the word “in” to yourself as you breath in and “out” to yourself as you breathe out. When thoughts or distractions come into your mind, just maintain an accepting attitude and then bring your attention back to the breath.

In settling down we somehow are able to connect more fully with our deepest wishes and priorities. Making choices becomes more clear when we know in our heart of hearts what we want and need. Meditating even for 5-10 minutes once or twice daily can make a significant difference in the quality of your life.

‘Thank you’ as a ritual.

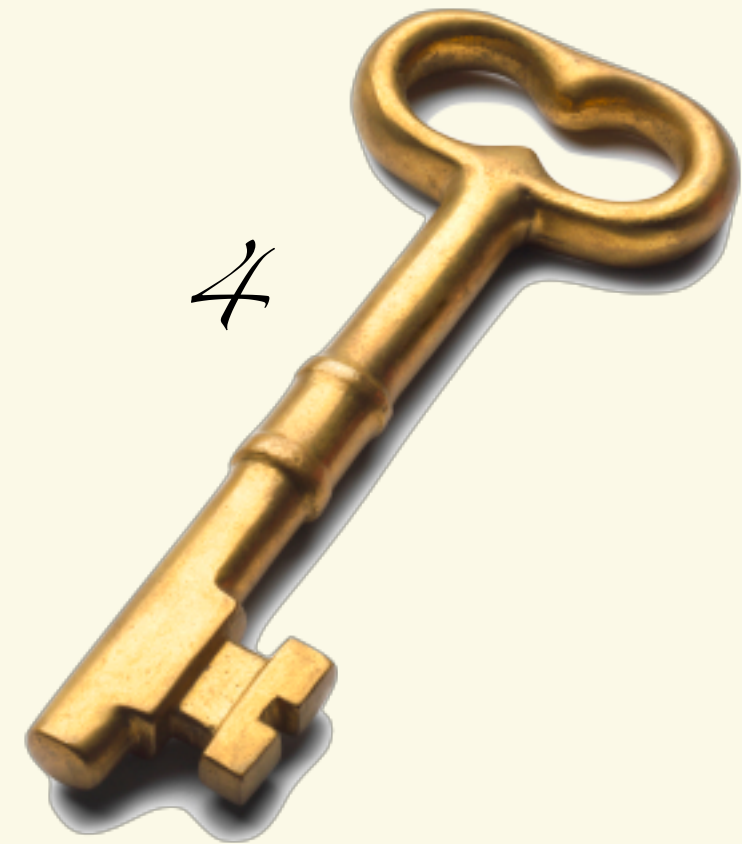
Get into the habit of writing in a gratitude journal. Write down three things that you feel grateful for every day. This action develops a part of the brain that plays an important role in enhancing self-esteem, improving energy level, and amplifying our experience of happiness. Saying thank you to a friend, colleague, or loved one elevates their mood as well as your own and strengthens relationships.

Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Find your flow.

Whether it is at work, at home, or participating in recreational activities, find those activities in which you are so engrossed that you lose your sense of time. Integrate those activities into your everyday life. Getting lost in the moment is a good barometer of those things that you truly enjoy. Building in flow time helps cultivate creativity, a sense of calm and balance. It is immersing yourself in what you are good at and feel passionately about, commonly referred to as 'being in the zone.'

Also, hanging out with friends and doing things you love like skiing, singing, cooking, gardening, writing, or dancing allows one to feel very present in the moment and lose track of time. Those are the moments that we characterize as when we are having fun and at our happiest.



Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Build some fun activities into your daily life.

You will increase the chances of having a good time more consistently by adding something fun into your daily schedule. Perhaps it's a workout at the gym, an art class or getting together with a friend. Never underestimate the benefits of a good belly laugh!

Plan one adventure or novel experience each week. Building fun activities into your week stimulates and refreshes the brain and gives the feeling of time away from the everyday routine. This type of activity stirs the imagination and provides more energy for other tasks and responsibilities.



Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Schedule a physical activity in your day.

Physical activity needs not take a big chunk of time out of your day or be an elaborate commitment to the gym. It could be a brisk walk and some floor exercises for strength and flexibility at home. Your body needs to be exercised and your mind and spirit need to be rejuvenated – all of which can be accomplished by taking a mindful walk, yoga or Pilates class, a dance class or a bike ride, swimming or a multitude of other forms of exercise. Exercising almost always guarantees that you will feel better after the endorphins and serotonin kick in. Additional benefits include reduced body fat, stronger muscles, bones, and heart, and lower blood pressure. It also helps us look and feel healthier and fit leading to improved self-esteem.



Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Spend time in nature.

Walking outdoors, gardening, bird-watching, listening to rain drops, hearing ocean waves, watching snow fall or seeing a sunset - all of these activities help us to feel more grounded and balanced in the moment and give us greater perspective beyond the struggles of our everyday lives.



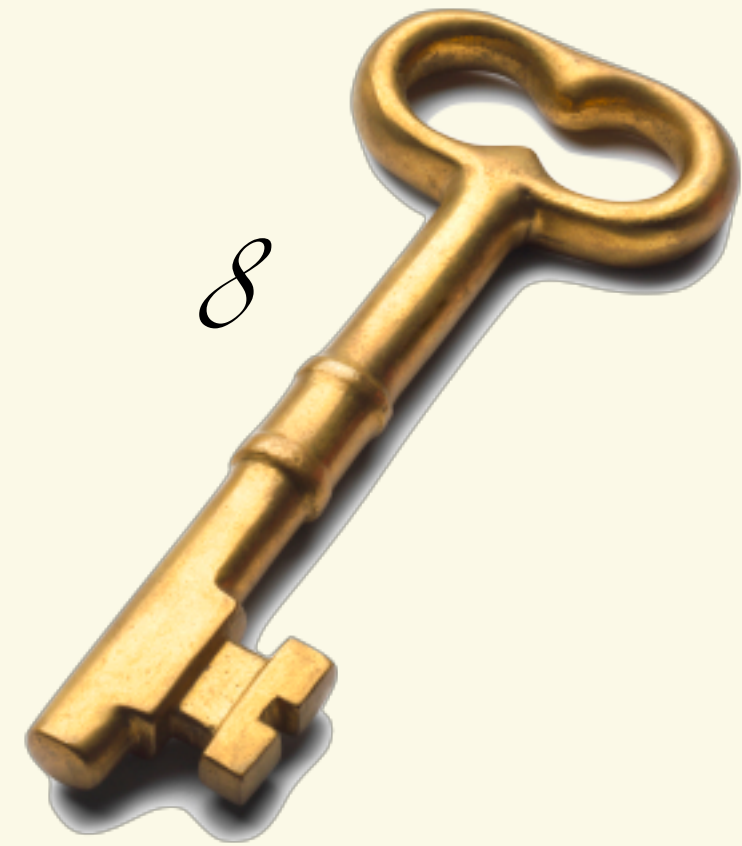
Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Do something for others.

Giving and doing for others is powerful because it helps the giver and the receiver and creates a connection between both. It helps the giver feel good for making a difference, which fires up the brain in a positive way.

Volunteering and performing random acts of kindness are correlated with heightened self-esteem, happiness, fulfillment and a sense of community. Feeling more balanced is often a natural outcome when doing for others.

Mentoring someone in your profession is another way to fulfill yourself while giving to someone else. While you share your skills and experience you will also gain a new perspective from someone with a different point of view.



Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Start your day with an affirmation.

Every day before getting out of bed repeat a simple, positive phrase or statement to yourself about you and the day ahead. Affirmations provide a tool for strengthening your sense of optimism and well-being. They are not intended to obscure the truth about your situation, but rather to train your brain to see things from a more positive vantage point. Affirmations, practiced regularly, influence the way our minds interpret events and improve our capacity to deal with life's challenges.

Some examples of affirmations:

I have everything I need right now.

Today is going to be a good day.

I feel strong, balanced and calm.

If you don't resonate with any of these affirmations, create your own. Just make sure your statement is simple, positive and relevant to your life. Keep in mind that affirmations are fluid. Adjust them or add new ones as your situation changes.

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Gaining Balance. Strategies for Happiness.



Ten Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun

Simplify your life.

Eliminate unnecessary stuff from your life. Getting rid of clutter in your office, kitchen, closets and drawers can be quite cathartic. Cleaning up your surroundings feels liberating and allows you to concentrate better and feel more in charge of your life.

Similarly making the decision to stop over scheduling your days frees you up to spend more of your time in a way that brings greater fulfillment and pleasure. Honing in on what is most important in your life is an ongoing process. Revisit your list of priorities when you lose your center or feel overwhelmed. As you become more focused on your priorities, your life will feel more simplified and balanced.



The Last Word - for Now

Adding to anyone's to do list seems counterintuitive considering how extraordinarily busy most of us tend to be. These are only guidelines. I encourage you to practice the keys that resonate with you. Most of the keys discussed do not require a significant time commitment.

Get started now with one of the ideas from this e-book. Start small, aim to integrate slowly, and you are more likely to be successful in the ongoing process of balancing your life.

By eventually integrating all 10 Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun, I know you will feel more energized, enriched and enlivened.

Please keep me informed about how you are doing as you integrate each of The 10 Keys to Balancing Love, Work and Fun into your life. Together we will create the support and inspiration to achieve a more balanced and happy life.

Write to me at randy@drkkg.com or leave comments on my site. www.drrkg.com