

Work-Life Blending.

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Summary.

Work-life balance or blending?

While work-life balance implies an ideal state, work-life blending proposes that our work and home-life decisions are part of our overall experience. Therefore, it requires being clear on priorities, making daily decisions and setting boundaries, communicating what we can and cannot do, and finally, being mindful of how our daily micro decisions impact our overall sense of well-being and control.

What does it mean to take control over our micro-decisions?

Everyone has thousands of decisions to make throughout the day (e.g., wake up early or sleep in; go to the gym or walk to work; go to partner's work party or stay at home, etc.). Taking control of our micro-decisions means being aware of when we have tendencies towards an external locus of control, and by challenging ourselves with small goals in our self-talk and daily actions to develop our internal locus of control.

How does stress impact our brains?

It is a myth that all stress is bad – sometimes the pressure that is placed on us can motivate us to achieve a desired goal (eustress). However, bad stress (distress) can affect our ability to make good micro-decisions. Being able to deal with stress by allowing our logical brain some time to kick in after our emotional brain reacts allows us to handle difficult situations with more ease.

Why is setting boundaries so important for our mental health?

It is no secret that most people in the workforce are juggling more than they can reasonably handle. However, what often happens is that this over-capacity isn't communicated to a manager or colleague before an over-loaded person begins to falter in productivity and loses sight of why they might be working. While it is a difficult conversation to have, setting boundaries not only helps our mental health, it sets realistic expectations for our time and resources, as well as our colleagues.

Actionable Tips

- Keep top of mind that work-life blending is not about finding a perfect balance; it's about making mindful decisions that are within your control.
- Define in writing what your top priority (e.g., more quality time at home) is over the next two weeks and make one decision that moves you in that direction. Track the number of decisions you make that shine a light on how your daily choices impact your sense of control.
- Understand how you make these micro-decisions by determining where you lie on the spectrum between internal locus of control and external locus of control by completing the quick LOC assessment.
- Set a daily goal (e.g., leave work by 5:00 PM) that supports your vision for work-life blending. This can increase your internal locus of control and help you realize that your micro decisions matter.
- Take time after a stressful stimulus occurs to collect your thoughts. Giving yourself just 2-5 minutes to calm your mind so you can shift your thinking from your emotional brain to your logical brain can help you avoid making knee-jerk decisions that can result in lost time.
- If you notice a colleague is stressed or reacting with their emotional brain, try asking two "yes" statements (e.g., "Is this situation making you feel frustrated?"). This allows them to feel heard and move to feeling more in control (logical brain state).
- Work-life blending requires a willingness to set personal boundaries in your daily routine (e.g., must be home by 6:00 PM, as I promised my daughter I would take her to the park) and then communicating them to others whom they may impact. This helps pre-frame what you will be doing and provides others an opportunity to offer feedback if they have questions. It also provides an opportunity to support you to achieve your desired outcome (e.g., reminds it is time for you to go). This can help you learn how to better self-advocate what you will do.

Resources

- [Locus of Control Quick Survey](https://www.howatthronline.com/quicksurveys/locusintro.a5w) (<https://www.howatthronline.com/quicksurveys/locusintro.a5w>)
- [Little Steps to Big Change, book by Bill Howatt and Gillian Livingston \(2017\)](https://na1.voxco.com/Media/208/Little%20Steps%20to%20Big%20Change.pdf) (<https://na1.voxco.com/Media/208/Little%20Steps%20to%20Big%20Change.pdf>)
- [Staying Afloat, book by Bill Howatt and Gillian Livingston \(2016\)](https://na1.voxco.com/Media/208/Staying%20Afloat.pdf) (<https://na1.voxco.com/Media/208/Staying%20Afloat.pdf>)
- [The CMHA's Online Training in Psychological Health and Safety](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/online-training-psychological-health-and-safety) (<https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/online-training-psychological-health-and-safety>)

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