

Balancing Act: Minimize interruptions to get work done

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By Cindy Krischer Goodman

The new year brings a return to stress from the seemingly impossible demands on us. In an effort to restore a sense of balance, I asked readers to tell me what workplace situations cause them the most stress. Then I took some of those questions to business/life coaches.

Q: While I'm working on an assignment for a client, I find myself constantly interrupted by spontaneous demands from supervisors. These interruptions keep me from reaching my goals and increase the feeling of being overwhelmed.

A: Tell supervisors that you prefer to work a straight hour without interruptions because you are not being as effective as you could be, said Gabriela Cora, a leadership consultant and author of ExecutiveHealth.com's "Leading Under Pressure." Then have time set aside to respond to calls or questions.

Don't have e-mails popping up all the time. Make sure whatever schedule you create is comfortable for you.

Q: I'm a single mother who needs her job. My company went through layoffs last year, and my position was spared. But I'm not certain my job is secure. I'm afraid to call in sick or leave early to pick up my daughter. I feel I have to put my job before my family, and it causes me stress.

A: The more afraid you are about losing your job, the more likely you are to manifest that, said Evie Hernandez, a certified life and business coach in Miami. When you act out of fear, you get lower results.

Remember what you want; most likely, it is balance. Come at it from a position of power vs. fear. Focus on being the best employee you can on that particular day. That might mean staying as late as you can and leaving to go pick up your daughter when she needs to be picked up. If you did not do your best for your family, when your head hits the pillow, you will feel guilty and stressed.

Q: I can't keep up with the avalanche of e-mail. I find myself missing important meetings or overlooking communications.

A: Audrey Thomas, founder of OrganizedAudrey.com, has three tips. First, presort all nontime-sensitive items, such as newsletters, into folders. Develop a habit to check on those folders with unread items when you are waiting at an airport or can sit and go through them.

Second, every e-mail represents a decision waiting to be made. Clutter is a result of delayed decisions. You have to force a decision, and most "take only a nanosecond," she said. About 50 percent of e-mails can be deleted once they are read. Delete, forward, delegate or drag it to a task or to-do list.

The last tip is to color-code your incoming e-mails. You might want to code everything from your boss in blue, so that you give blue e-mails a higher priority.

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