



These results support previous studies that have demonstrated the effectiveness and value of behavioral health interventions.

With proper treatment, the high costs of behavioral health problems in the workplace are increasingly avoidable. Timely and appropriate behavioral health interventions can help employees avoid prolonged losses in productivity and reduce unnecessary absenteeism—resulting in significant cost savings for employers and demonstrating a clear return on investment for behavioral health services. ♦

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## Managing Life and Work: A Psychiatrist's View

by Gabriela Corá-Locatelli, M.D., M.B.A.

Millions of Americans are thinking, planning, and scheming about how to stretch a 24-hour day into an endless and productive workday, an endless loop of “useful” time. Executives face the daily quandary of finding new ways to thrive in order to achieve higher goals, to meet increased competition, and to function with progressively limited resources. Busy executives now need to work more hours to maintain their lifestyles. As they move up or across the corporate ladder, they find escalating challenges to remain level-headed and even-tempered.

**The Balancing Act.** Working women and men currently face greater responsibilities. They have access to higher positions in their workplace, endlessly juggling tasks and attempting to master productive interactions. At the same time, they face household duties as they arrive home tired after an exhausting day at work. Although some succeed in balancing and integrating this

complex situation, others end up dreading the once-wonderful new opportunities.

**Trouble at the Top.** Burnt-out, energy-depleted, or constantly stressed, some executives find themselves unable to take pleasure in their hard-earned position and financial stability. Instead of connecting with loved ones, relaxing, and enjoying life as they recharge batteries for the next day, executives find their time at home is just a continuation of a “busy day at work.”

Some of these successful executives and entrepreneurs increasingly struggle to maintain a healthy body weight, blood pressure, and good mental health. I see patients who find it difficult to fall or stay asleep; they struggle with body tension and can't relax. They may gradually increase their consumption of caffeinated drinks during the day to “stay alert and awake” so that they can continue to perform as they did in their twenties. After an exhausting day, they may decide to have an extra glass of wine or beer at night to “get some sleep.”

I've even seen patients and clients rush into my office to talk about life and work issues, then tear off to yoga class “to meditate and relax,” then run home to take care of family. They honestly believe they are balancing their life and their work because they fit everything into their schedule. This is what I call the “myth of life/work balance.”

These harmful sequences of events become worse over time unless there is a serious attempt to break this negative cycle.

**Managing Your Life.** Taking great care of our physical, emotional, and intellectual health is essential to a balanced life. Here are some steps my patients, clients, and I have found helpful in regaining a balanced life.

Expedia Inc. polled 2,100 workers and found that 31% fail to use all their allotted vacation days.—Workforce Week, January 29–February 4, 2006.

### Mental Note

Rushing off “to relax” is what I call the myth of life/work balance.—G. Corá-Locatelli

**Step 1. Analyze your current life/work situation.** Assess your current level of performance, productivity, health, and well-being. Are you in tune with your own vision and values? Your professional values? Your employer's mission and values? If conflicts exist, don't ignore them; think about how to resolve them and plan on improving this situation.

**Step 2. Learn about the negative effects of stress on your physical and emotional health.** Identify the biological factors and the environmental sources of stress and review strategies to manage them. Educate yourself about better ways to manage your time and bring those ideas into action.

**Step 3. Establish your priorities and set boundaries.** You must be in charge of your schedule. Do not allow work to creep into your personal time. This may have been more easily done in the '60s and '70s, when the boundaries between work and home were clear, but it's important that the new technologies—the e-mails and the BlackBerries—work for you and not vice versa.

**Step 4. Develop a master plan of action.** A plan is vital in the same way as it is for any enterprise. First, fix what is not working for you, and then, create a pro-active plan of continued improvement. For example, we know that 30 minutes of daily physical activity will help us maintain all aspects of our health. Therefore, exercise is not an option; it becomes a nonnegotiable, must-do task that needs to be included in your busy schedule. Eating well (having three meals a day) becomes nonnegotiable and part of your master plan. Getting adequate sleep (7–8 hours each night) to replenish your stamina also becomes key if you want to sustain periods of intense activity throughout the course of the day.

**Step 5. Relax.** It works. Exercise will both help you relax and help you focus on your work. Additionally, learning and incorporating relaxation techniques as a part of your regular schedule will be a long-standing benefit in your life and will assist you in creating a strong core that can maximize sustained success. Avoid drinking more than one cup of coffee a day or more than one alcoholic beverage a day. Watch the caffeine in your soft drinks.

**Step 6. Build solid relationships.** The support of and connection to family, friends, and colleagues is known to sustain those under stress, as was shown for workers directly affected by the tragedy of 9/11.

**Step 7. Revisit your plan on a regular basis.** What works for you today may not work for you next year. Change is inevitable and offers a wonderful opportunity for constant improvement.

We can all appreciate the incredible challenges executives and employees face in their daily responsibilities. I continue to face and conquer these challenges myself. But I know that it is imperative to proactively design a master plan to “juggle it all.”

It's not so much that we need to “balance” life and work as that we need to integrate effective strategies as we “manage” life and work. We must anticipate difficulties, as well as manage our productivity and performance, in order to sustain a healthy lifestyle, build strong relationships, and ultimately achieve and enjoy our well-being. ♦

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Men are finally showing signs of rebelling against the 24/7 corporate ethic, according to an article in *Fortune* magazine. (See *Get a Life!* by J. and M. Miller, *Fortune*, November 16, 2005.) The authors report that in a survey of Fortune 500 male executives, half of those surveyed wondered if the sacrifices they've made for their careers are worth it. Read more about managing life and work in the next issue of *Mental HealthWorks*.

33% of workers in 2005 said they would be checking in with the office while on vacation.—MSN Careers.