

10 tips for better work–life balance

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In Australia, we have a reputation for being laidback and carefree, but when it comes to hard yakka, our deeply ingrained preference is for a culture of long hours.

But that attitude is slowly changing. Thanks to progressive employers, who are eager to attract and retain skilled employees in the ‘war for talent’, policies and practices that address work–life balance are beginning to make their mark.

So how can you break the stress–cycle and get your life back?

1. Work out what matters The first rule of balancing work, family and lifestyle commitments is to be realistic about your needs and goals. It's far better to know that you won't be able to manage on a part-time salary before you've started discussions with your employer than to realise halfway through.

2. Know your entitlements The old adage is true: knowledge is power. There's a large volume of information available on flexible, family–friendly working arrangements, including workplace legislation and policies, so take advantage of it and make sure you know exactly what you're entitled to.

3. Negotiate an agreement Whether its flexible working arrangements, childcare support, or parental leave, the family–friendly options available to you will depend on your employer. Aim for a win–win outcome by anticipating your manager's concerns, stating your needs, highlighting business benefits, and keeping your emotions in check.

4. Schedule your time An easy way to manage your time is by using activity logs, prioritised to–do lists, and action plans. This way, if you feel that there aren't enough hours in the day, you can take control of your time by monitoring where it goes. Use rewards and deadlines to help you stay on track.

5. Learn to say ‘no’ If you want to buck the trend towards putting in ‘face time’ and incorporate some real balance into your life, then learn to say ‘no’ to unreasonable demands and leave the office on time without feeling guilty. Saying ‘no’ with respect is not only effective, it feels good, too.

6. Ask for help There's nothing worse than feeling stressed and overwhelmed because you're trying to do everything yourself. Fortunately, letting go and learning to delegate will help you work smarter not harder, and can develop your leadership skills, too. Take baby steps by delegating one task at a time to people you can trust.

7. Be web savvy When creating a better work–life balance, don't neglect the convenience of technology. A growing number of companies now offer their services online, making many time–consuming chores a thing of the past. Banking, paying bills, and grocery shopping can all be done electronically, cutting stress and freeing–up valuable time.

8. Look after your health Constant exposure to stress can lead to exhaustion and burn out. To keep the effects of stress on your health to a minimum, make sure you get enough sleep, eat healthily, and exercise regularly. Relaxation is also a great stress–buster, so make time for your favourite hobby daily.

9. Focus on end results To keep yourself motivated, it's important to focus on positive outcomes as much as possible. Action is a natural enemy of procrastination, so consider visualising the extra time you'll be able to spend with your family to spur you on to reach maximum effectiveness daily.

10. Take time out for you Resist the temptation to let work spill over into your personal life. Instead, keep your personal life for family time alone, and make sure you create clearly designated boundaries for work and personal tasks. Consider ‘unplugging’ regularly from your laptop, email and mobile phone; the minute you leave the office is ideal.