

# Managing Balance in Ministry

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Many of us who work in ministry have lives that are out of balance! Ministries often need more people but can't afford them, we're called to the greatest task on earth and want to give it our all, and more. But at what price do we push ourselves further than we should? Many are watching us—neighbors, friends, and family—and our relationships with them often suffer. There are tools that can help! Let's look at a few.

## Managing Our Environments

In his great book *Rising Above the Level of Mediocrity*, Chuck Swindoll said, "People who soar [like eagles] are those who refuse to sit back, sigh, and wish things would change." They manage their environment.

When I consider this, I picture a thermostat. We often don't realize how much we affect those around us, but when we do, we can choose to manage our environment like a thermostat does. Thermostats need to know the temperature, so they come with built-in thermometers. Then they use that knowledge; they don't just reflect their environment, they manage it.

Here are four questions that have helped me assess how I'm managing my environment:

- Q1. Does the pressure of the moment get to you? If so, those around you will be stressed too.
- Q2. Do you work too many hours for your personal or family health? If so, those around you will too.
- Q3. Do you take breaks? If you plan breaks and rest, so will those around you.
- Q4. Are you an approachable team player? We need to demonstrate appropriate schmooze (the art of casually visiting with others) to show we care.

This came to me in a sensitive way in our office. One day I noticed a member of our team sitting at her desk crying. When I asked her what was wrong she looked up, still crying, and said, "I just can't keep your pace." I almost responded that I never asked her to, but I often worked from dawn until late at night and hadn't realized that I was setting the pace in our office.

## The Sabbatical Principle

When I told my friend and mentor, Dr. Ted Engstrom, about that situation, he shared with me his two-part Sabbatical Principle.

*Part 1.* Regularly take breaks to remain resourceful and to avoid burning out. He recommended:

- a couple of minutes every hour,
- twenty minutes each day,
- one day each month,
- at least one week each year, and
- an extended time every seven years.

*Part 2.* He also recommended dividing each day into three sections: morning, afternoon, and evening. Three sections each day, times seven days in a week, equals twenty-one sections in a week. He said, "Try to not schedule more than fifteen periods per week." Then he said, "Nick, I wish I'd been doing this all of my professional life!" And he wasn't only talking about work schedules, he was talking about *all* scheduling.

I've discovered great freedom through his Sabbatical Principle. During heavy workload periods I can take a morning or an afternoon off to balance my schedule. You may have that kind of flexibility too. In either case, try to not schedule yourself too much. Otherwise you won't be a good resource in your office or your home.

## Do You Plan for Daydream Time?

It is the key to organizational vision and health. Mr. Benno C. Schmidt, Jr. became President of Yale in 1986, and in a television spot he addressed this very point.

From behind a mahogany desk in a beautiful, paneled office he said, "When they asked me to take the presidency of Yale University, I told them that if I had to live by a packed, frenetic agenda I could manage it, but I couldn't lead it." Then he leaned back, swiveled his chair around, and sat gazing out the window. That was his daydream time!

If we're going to serve well, we also need to have daydream time so we can creatively come up with new solutions to old problems. Daydream time helps us to be resourceful.

Remember that you set the temperature in your workplace. You need these resources to set a comfortable temperature.

## What About Excellence?

We have been discussing some ways to manage an appropriate level of balance in our lives. We are all leaders at some level, and as such we are responsible for how we lead. Scripture warns fathers not to exasperate their children. We might paraphrase that verse, "Leaders, do not exasperate your followers."

We should push for excellence in our lives. I don't think there's anything that adorns the work of Christ as much as excellence except for healthy relationships.

You may know the books *In Search Of Excellence* and *A Passion For Excellence* by Tom Peters and Nancy Austin. In the second book, the second-to-last paragraph says, "We are frequently asked if it is possible to have it all. A full and satisfying personal life and a full and satisfying, hardworking professional one. Our answer is no.

"The price of excellence is time, energy, attention and focus. At the very same time that energy, attention and focus could have gone toward enjoying your daughter's soccer game. Excellence is a high cost item. As David Ogilvy observed in *Confessions Of An Advertising Man*, 'If you prefer to spend all of your time growing roses or playing with your children, I like you better. But do not complain that you're not being promoted fast enough!'"

## Apostles of Balance

Rich Buhler, a syndicated Christian radio host, has been called an "apostle of balance." It's important that we strive for excellence in our lives, but also keep the balance.

I'd like to share a short story with you as we bring this article to a close. A biblical scholar was sitting in his English study in the days before electricity. As he looked through his study window, he could see across the valley in which he was situated a lamplighter going along and lighting the gas street lamps. As dusk settled in and the light continued to fade, the scholar noted he could no longer see the lamplighter, but he could tell where the lamplighter had been by the trail of lights he left along his way.

We affect those around us. We owe them balance. As we think of our trail of lights, what kind of a trail are we leaving?

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