

“How do you properly achieve a work–personal life balance?”

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As pharmacists, we all have part of the “perfection” gene to varying degrees. I have seen colleagues, myself included, fall victim to meticulously combing over small details in the workplace, taking work home, and creating enormous to-do lists while juggling the demands of family and friends. Some days, we appear to be managing all the responsibilities of work and personal life, while other days, let’s be honest, we are a mess. How does one create a balanced work and personal life without letting go of the responsibilities we have placed on ourselves? I have used my closest mentors for these very questions, and below is a collection of their advice over the years.

Define Your Balance

It starts with defining what a work–personal life balance looks like to you. Our priorities may not be the same throughout different phases of our career and lives, so taking the time to periodically reassess and define what a balanced life looks like may help create a foundation for what is most important. Some may believe their work and personal lives are on opposite sides of a pendulum, sometimes leaning more to one end than to another. Others believe their work and personal lives can be integrated and, by having fewer boundaries between the two, often have fewer rules to dictate what they can or cannot do. Some may love what they do so much that doing anything else brings them no personal joy. In the end, it is up to the individual to assess what balance looks like. You may have to make modifications or even sacrifices to achieve your defined balance.

Create Technology-Free Time

This was a tough one for me. A few years ago, I often used technology as a “break” to take my mind off work and spent countless hours on Pinterest, Amazon, the news, Facebook, viral cat videos, and the list goes on. I discovered very quickly how much of a time waster it was. Before I realized it, 30 or 45 minutes had gone by, and I hadn’t accomplished much of what I wanted to in my personal life. More recently, however, I have created tech-free time at home. This has allowed me to have “unattached” quality time with friends and family and less time with my face buried in a digital screen.

Create Work Efficiency

With increased demands or long to-do lists, it can be difficult to get it all done during the day. I have often found myself packing things up at the end of the day, saying, “I’ll look at this tonight.” Sometimes, our careers aren’t built around a standard 8- to 9-hour day, and we may expect that some work will be completed at home. For instances like these, some of the best advice I received was to say no to additional voluntary work or to state that I would be happy to help once I got project X completed. Dedicate only certain evenings of the week to work-related projects. You may find that setting a time limit to certain evenings allows you to be flexible in work responsibilities while not affecting too much of your personal life. Do you find yourself using every minute of the workday in a productive way? If not, try to identify those inefficiencies, and use that time to tackle smaller tasks.

Make Time for Self-Care and Hobbies

When was the last time you did something for yourself on a regular basis? Finding time to care for you and decompress in a positive and enjoyable way may not only improve your personal morale, but also positively affect your work life. If you have flown on any airline, you’ve heard the statement that “if

there is a loss in cabin pressure, place the oxygen mask over your own face first, before assisting someone else.” Keeping this idea in mind, if you can focus on doing something good for yourself regularly, you may be better at caring for other responsibilities both at home and at work.

Creating a balance in work and personal life is not easy. We can quickly forget about the goals we have set for ourselves by a work or personal life setback. My mentor told me that creating a work–personal life balance is like training for a marathon—you can’t be a runner without running, but you also can’t forget about rest-days. It takes training, consciousness, and making small incremental changes to improve performance. Achieving a work–personal life balance is no different and often requires recognizing your roles in both environments, defining your balance, and allowing your roles to integrate as a partnership rather than creating silos.

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