



The 3 keys to work-life balance and wellness

Lisa Knowles, DDS

The average person spends 47 hours at work per week, according to a 2014 Gallup Poll. When you add in a commute, after-hours engagements and work preparation, there's not much time left for life's demands.

Additionally, thanks to technological advances, the workplace is spilling over into our home lives, as well. Not many years ago, the occasional nighttime phone call for information or a dental emergency was rare. As a college student, I had to go home when the computer lab closed. But today, the work continues 24/7.

More than ever, we need to develop skills to achieve more wellness and balance in our lives. Although there are many ways to achieve these goals, I group these skills into three main categories.

Key 1: Awareness

Becoming more aware takes effort! We often don't even realize we're caught in the proverbial hamster wheel – sometimes getting nowhere. Unfortunately, it takes a lot to knock us off that wheel. It may be an injury or a loved one's plea to take more time for ourselves or them. We might experience a gener-



alized malaise, or even depression. The signs are typically there; we simply have to notice them. Or, we need to be open to someone's suggestion that a change is in order. We need to be willing to welcome recognition of our perceived weaknesses, and turn them into health indicators.

If we welcome indicators rather than view them as the enemy, we can learn from them and set new boundaries and limits. By identifying these early warning signs of trouble, we can often avoid more serious problems later on.

Key 2: A disciplined approach

We must be more disciplined

to change and adjust our old habits, routines and work expectations – and that means setting limitations on the amount of work we will do after regular hours.

How can we stick to an exercise routine to help us burn off cortisol and stay healthy if we have a mandate to work? We need to commit to raising our heart rates and exercising our muscles, and not letting other priorities hijack our personal wellness obligation. To balance out, we also need to commit to doing mind-slowng activities during our busy times, and find time for breaks. Not long ago, a colleague showed me her Apple watch that has a breath button for a quick meditation whenever needed. What a great idea! These pauses during the day can be just enough to reset the parasympathetic nervous system and move our bodies into a rest-and-digest state, rather than a fight-or-flight state.

Most of all, we've got to avoid the sense that we're being "lazy" if we don't work 60-plus hours a week. When I hear someone bragging about how many overtime hours they worked, I don't compliment or "one-up" them. I simply listen to the story and remain neutral in the conversation.

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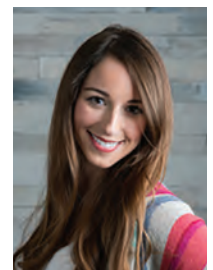
7 wellness tips you can adopt in 30 minutes or less

Laura Maly, Co-founder
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This year has brought on more challenges than we ever saw coming, and our mental and physical health are suffering. Amidst the uncertainty and ever-changing world we live in, it's important to take the time to prioritize ourselves so we can show up as our best for our family, friends, team and patients.

I have been involved in a mastermind group that aims to help leaders creatively solve problems. Most importantly, it teaches the value of

taking better care of our organization by taking better care of ourselves. One of the tenets of the group that we reflect on each week is a seven-point wellness plan. We've established positive habits that allow us to uplift ourselves and those around us, and start our days with clarity and purpose. This



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Key 3: Creative adaptability

Adaptability and creativity help guide us when we become more aware of a need to change and want a different pathway. Patients often have a hard time adapting to the changes we recommend, unless we give them a really good reason to make that change. The same occurs for us. If we can create a good reason for change, we will believe ourselves. Without that reason, it's likely most of us will fall back into our old habits.

Workplace wellness organizations help companies implement wellness programs into their businesses and offer tried-and-true programming to supplement workers' health routines. If you're a small business and can't afford corporate wellness initiatives, you can still incorporate incentives for better health in other ways. For example, Intuit offers reimbursable expenses, such as meditation and mindfulness classes. Or, you might pay a portion of your team's gym memberships. Or bring in a nutritionist over a lunch hour to review best eating habits.

Many dentists are in a position to foster a wellness program within their work spaces. Such programs needn't cost a lot to be effective. Mostly, it's the culture that can be changed to create a more healthy work expectation. That's free to do.

What about outside the office?

Our bodies need to rest and rejuvenate. If we only run on one fast-and-furious speed, we run the risk of unhealthy consequences. Not eating well, lack of exer-

cise, not taking the time to rest our brains and bodies – they all add up, and the outcome isn't pretty. There are a few things we can do:

Get outdoors.

Nature often makes us slow down. Our minds can wander away from work and feel refreshed before returning to our indoor schedules.

Practice mindfulness-based stress reduction.

Live in the present moment, and to do so without judgment. Stop obsessing about the past and the future. Think about the now.

Turn off technology.

Completely. Use the power-off button occasionally to truly unplug. When you turn your phone back on and realize everything still functions without you, it's actually rather refreshing.

By using these wellness strategies, we can all learn to cultivate healthier habits. A happier, healthier home and work culture leads

to a more positive lifestyle, more enjoyable family time, a more pleasant work environment with fewer missed days of work and a new way of thinking that can be shared with patients as well. As health care professionals, let's lead the way with wellness. Our bodies will appreciate it, and so will our patients.



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to someone can make their day, and yours, too!

6. Learn something. Make ample space in your days to learn and grow. Prior to motherhood, I was relentless in pursuit of my goals at work, but it came at a cost. For many of us, suffering through task fatigue every day is the norm, but it can take a toll on you and those around you.

7. Teach someone something. Even as you pass on a skill to another person, studies show you'll likely learn

something about the task, or yourself, along the way.

I can accomplish these seven tasks in 30 minutes a day. I strive to hit most of these goals first thing in the morning, but I find my "learn something" and "teach something" moments happen throughout the day. As a wellness junkie, I know what good habits are. Over the course of building my agency, some of those habits were sacrificed. But now, I make it a priority to follow this seven-point guide, regain those healthy

habits, and build new ones for myself, my family and my team.

Laura Maly is Co-Founder at Wonderist Agency, a full-service dental marketing agency that has helped countless practices increase their new patient numbers and thrive with cohesive marketing strategies. You can connect with Laura online at wonderistagency.com or on Instagram at [@wonderistagency](https://www.instagram.com/wonderistagency) or [@lauraamaly](https://www.instagram.com/lauraamaly).