

Integrating your personal life and career

Are you satisfied with the balance in your life? Do you have enough time for the things that are important to you, or do you feel pulled in too many directions? When was the last time you did something just for yourself or experienced fun and adventure? Do you sense a need to make changes in your life? Balancing your career with your personal life requires being candid with yourself about your priorities and deciding how you use your time and energy—in other words, optimizing your life choices.

Integrating your personal life and career is not just a challenge for women or for dual-career couples with children. Everyone deserves to feel satisfied with life. You need to examine your frustrations and expectations. Frustrations usually result from unrealistic expectations, so let go of your perfect plans and get off your hamster wheel. Your life should not be an emergency. View the integration of your personal and professional lives as a process rather than a destination. See your life and career as they are, not as you wish they were. Take responsibility for your situation instead of feeling like a victim or blaming others.

The Success Skills column provides practical advice to help pharmacists become more effective in their professional and personal lives. Installments are contributed by and reflect the views of Sara J. White, M.S., FASHP, Pharmacy Leadership Coach, Mountain View, CA.

Learn from pharmacists who seem to have achieved an acceptable personal life–career balance. Ask them what works and what they wish were different in their lives. Ask them to describe a typical workday and a typical nonworkday. Strive to understand how they are handling the aspects of life that are bothering you.

Examine your need to be a perfectionist in everything you do beyond pharmacy. Most nonpharmacy-related activities do not require perfection, and the extra time perfection takes might be better spent on additional activities. Experi-



ment with doing less than perfection in a nonpharmacy-related activity and see if anyone comments on the difference. An integrated personal life–career is never going to be perfect.

Individualize your solutions given your particular life circumstances. Consider the available work options such as working less than full time, job sharing with another pharmacist, telecommuting or working from home, and asking for schedule flexibility. There are tradeoffs with any of these options, but you are already making unconscious tradeoffs

now. These options do not indicate a lack of professional commitment and should not lead to your being considered a second-class pharmacist. Given the pharmacist shortage, pharmacy leaders need to provide these work options if they are to maintain a full staff.

Consider your life in phases and sequence it; think of your career as a marathon of 30–40 years rather than a sprint. In the past, pharmacists' careers were linear, with a rising slope of professional involvement and responsibility from graduation until retirement. Young practitioners were expected to “pay their dues” before they were given additional

responsibilities or could serve in professional organization leadership positions. Today, most pharmacists are in dual-career couples raising children so their careers may be M-shaped instead—increasing professional involvement until children arrive, then a dip while the children are raised, and finally a reclaiming of professional involvement and responsibilities when the children are raised and out of the house. Stage your life such that

you enjoy each part of it. Do not try to raise young children while serving as president of your state chapter or working on a major project at work, because you will be overwhelmed and not enjoy any of your endeavors. You can still “have it all” but not at the same time.

Consider freeing up time by hiring a maid, nanny, babysitter, or gardener or paying for online shopping, laundry services, banking, bill paying, or grocery delivery. Yes, it will cost money, but think how much your time is worth and decide what is the most cost-effective use

of your finite time. Consider employing available technologies, such as wireless e-mail, personal digital assistants, and laptop computers, that will allow you to work wherever you are (e.g., child's soccer game, waiting in line, waiting for a meeting to start).

Set aside some uninterrupted time to sit down with a sheet of paper and reflect on your current life. Figure out who you are, what you want, and how you are going to get it. Your work and personal life must fit together. A satisfying life is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle: even though you know the final outcome, you have to work piece by piece. A successful life is not built in a single day but over a steady, productive, fulfilling integrated career and life.

Understand your life priorities. Where you spend your time indicates what really matters to you. Determine your major roles, activities, and priorities (e.g., being a pharmacist, son or daughter, parent, or spouse or significant other; devoting time to hobbies, exercise, spiritual activities, or other personal pursuits), and give back to the community and others appropriately. Write these thoughts in a list to help clarify your thinking.

Along with the list of your roles and activities, create an "absolutely yes" or "must do" list. This list contains commitments and priorities that are nonnegotiable. You are going to say no to everything not on your "absolutely yes" list. Saying no to some activities to make time to enjoy more important ones can be even more important in integrating your life. Saying "no, but thanks for asking," without feeling guilty will take practice. Do not feel like you have to justify your decision. It is your life, and you are entitled to determine what you do. Inevitably you will have a "maybes, if time allows" list. Be careful of this list, since there is never enough time for everything you want to do. Carefully consider your priorities when making this list.

Considering your roles and activities and your "absolutely yes" list, imagine your life as a house, with each room containing one of your roles or activities. Draw out a single-level floor plan al-

locating the size of each room based on the amount of time you currently devote to it. The size of the rooms will probably never be evenly divided and will change over time. You are just trying to visualize the reality of your current life and deciding what is working and what is not. In viewing your life's floor plan, are you satisfied with the relative size of the various rooms as they relate to each other, given that your time is finite? Do you need to change the sizes of some rooms, realizing that to enlarge some will mean reducing others? Do what makes sense at this time in your life, and align your expectations with this reality to minimize your frustration. Involve significant others in these decisions as appropriate. Try to strike a balance that is satisfying and sustainable, even though you will be readjusting it over time.

Your life is your message, so think about the legacy you are building day by day. Try to constantly balance your priorities no matter the circumstances, because how you use your time is a measure of your commitment and concern. Your legacy is how people will remember you. If you are not handling your life the way you want to be remembered, then you need to make changes now. Time and the way you use it are your currency for having an integrated life, so make informed decisions. The quality of what we "buy" with our time is a reflection of our ability to make decisions about what is important to us.

You need to understand how you are actually using your time now. Take a few work days and nonworkdays and keep a time log. Put a piece of paper in your pocket, and every one to two hours note what you just did. Analyze these data to determine how much time you are devoting to each of your roles. Repeat this time log as needed. For a designated time period (perhaps two to four weeks), formally schedule time for each of your responsibilities and the things on your "absolutely yes" list (even small amounts of time should be scheduled). Schedule a "date night" every week with your spouse or significant other, a game night with your family, one-on-one time with a

child, or time for yourself. Think of this time as interchangeable time blocks designated for different kinds of important activities or roles. Find some time to just play and relax. You not only deserve it but need it.

Put your schedule in writing and keep it in a place where you can easily view it daily. Be careful not to get over-committed, so you can accommodate the unknown and enjoy what comes your way. Volunteer your time wisely by making conscious decisions versus just responding to others' needs. Leave some unscheduled time for unexpected things. Use your schedule and "absolutely yes" list as a basis for saying yes or no to new demands on your time.

At the end of the time period, review your satisfaction with your new integrated life and make any needed adjustments in time and priorities as you formally plan the next time period. If you had to postpone a role or activity, address it on the next schedule or readjust your priorities. Do not strive for perfection; just do the best you can. Regularly review your schedule and your life for activities not relating to your priority roles. If you are not gaining something from an activity, consider forgoing this activity or review your level of involvement.

Remember that having an integrated life is like walking a tightrope: You may wobble from time to time, and an integrated life is always a work in progress. You are always going to have to make some tradeoff decisions, so be sure to make them consciously to avoid being swept along by other peoples' agendas. If you feel guilty or as if you are sacrificing an aspect of your life, readjust your priorities and your allocation of time and acknowledge that it is the journey that brings satisfaction rather than any one time period.

If you are not totally satisfied with your current personal life-career integration, think about the changes you would like to make, and develop a written action plan with the concrete steps needed. Create a timeline, stop procrastinating, and take action. Consider using a mentor (a pharmacist who has successfully inte-

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grated his or her personal life and career) with whom you can discuss your plan and progress.

Suggested readings

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