



## How to improve your work-life balance

by Gaelle Piernikarch, July 2019

The summer break is often a good time to think about what matters to us and how we balance our work and private life. With increasing pressure for performance and technologies that enable us to work around the clock, work-life balance has been a hot topic for years now. Although its meaning might be different from one person to another, there is a common understanding that the danger lies in letting work take precedence over our private activities. And so, we should protect our private life and give it enough space, time and energy to keep things in balance.

Yet taking this protective attitude can become very de-energizing. Imagine yourself with one foot on each side of a balance board: this might be an excellent exercise at times, but it can also become exhausting if you are permanently on the board. So, how about re-thinking the balance between work and private life for instance, as a channel of energy and create a flow that sustains both?

### Opening new energy channels - Aligning work and life

Current trends such as the digitization of work processes are also strongly impacting our private lives as consumers. Most changes we are experiencing at work have also become part of our daily life, so that it is sometimes difficult to separate the nature of our work activities from our private habits. In some fields, some might say that life has become more work, others will say that we are empowered, to use a term from the corporate world, to do more things ourselves and thus be more independent and in control of our lives. That is also a matter of perspective. In any case, even when we try to segment our life areas, the borders are not as clear as we might want. We may have different behaviors related to the situation, but are our personal values really different whether we are work or at home, interacting with colleagues or with friends?

So, rather than a 50/50 split of two segmented areas of our life, balancing work and private life could be closer to juggling or blending different areas, activities, social relationships and habits. Which practices can we train to channel the energy flows between all these aspects?

### Creating healthy habits to raise your energy across life areas

Vitality is at the core of our well-being at work and in our private life. Our body has a wonderful capacity of regenerating, providing we help it with some practices. Exercising, sleeping well, eating healthy food, and having fun are drivers that contribute to feeling good.

Along these lines, neuroscientists also discovered that our brain, far from only losing neurons, keeps producing new ones our life long. Professor Pierre-Marie Lledo, Head of Neuroscience at Institut Pasteur Paris, determined 5 key factors that keep the neuronal production going (1):

- Reducing stress from the urban environment (such as noise and visual pollution)
- Avoiding chronic consumption of psychotropic drugs (e.g.; antidepressants)
- Making regular physical efforts
- Cultivating frequent social interactions
- Preserving our capacity to marvel

In addition, they found that keeping the flow of your thoughts or tasks uninterrupted strongly contributes to the vitality of your brain. So, whether at work or at home, you should avoid too much multitasking and keep your energy focused.

Further studies show that sustaining these habits with regular contact to natural environments, such as viewing and walking in nature, greatly help to promote positive emotions, heightening physical and mental energy (2).

### Changing your perspective on stress

We are used to the idea that stress is a negative factor in our life that damages our health. Yet, some of the latest research on stress and health shows very interesting findings: while most researchers confirm that a lot of chronic stress should be avoided, they shed a new light on the consequences of stress on our health. Stress itself is not important as what matters is in fact the meaning we give to the stressful situation: that is what actually determines the intensity of stress we feel.

Furthermore, according to a recent survey (3), it is our perception of stress that has the strongest impact on our health and our well-being, not the amount of stress. In this study, people who reported a lot of stress but had the perception that stress had no impact on health, had the lowest hazard ratio of any group in the survey, even lower than of the group who reported almost no stress. On the other hand, individuals who perceived that stress affected their health and reported a large amount of stress had an increased risk of premature death.

Other studies even find positive effects from stress on our brain and our health, as long as it released through short-term and intermittent stressful events. In this case, stress appears to be strengthening our immune system, as well as boosting the production of neurons, and increasing our cognitive and learning performance (4).

So, adopting a positive attitude towards stress and seeing it as a resource will help your mind and body not only better cope with it but also channel its energy to regenerate your internal resources.

<sup>1</sup> Pierre-Marie Lledo, Jean-Didier Vincent: *Le cerveau sur mesure*, Odile Jacob (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Eva Selhub, Alan C. Logan: *Your Brain on Nature* Harper Collins (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Keller, A., Litzelman, K., Wisk, L. E., Maddox, T., Cheng, E. R., Creswell, P. D., & Witt, W. P. (2012): "Does the perception that stress affects health matter? The association with health and mortality." *Health Psychology*, 677-684.

<sup>4</sup> Kelly McGonigal: "The Upside of Stress", Avery (2015).

## In conclusion

Self-awareness and mindfulness about all the aspects that matter in your life and that increase vitality are key to re-energize work-life balance and spread healthy practices in your teams and organization.

By focusing energy on all these aspects while cultivating curiosity, fun and a positive outlook on life, and by putting in place the right mix of healthy habits that reconcile body and mind instead of adopting a defensive attitude, you can reopen the channels of energy that will naturally keep things in balance.



**Gaëlle Piernikarch** is the founder & CEO of Cambiana and has been working as a coach, change facilitator and team trainer for more than twelve years. Gaëlle is a certified MBTI® Practitioner, accredited in the International Team Trust Indicator (ITTI™) and trained in Appreciative Inquiry. [gaelle@cambiana.com](mailto:gaelle@cambiana.com)

