

3 ways leaders can navigate imbalanced lives

“Balance is bull---,” says Sue Hawkes, a leadership expert and author of *Chasing Perfection: Shatter the Illusion; Minimize Self-Doubt & Maximize Success*. “A perfect work-life balance is not possible for those in leadership positions. It’s more useful to strive for work-life integration, where you not only bring your work home, but also bring your home to work.”

In debunking the balance theme, Hawkes gives three tips for leaders to help them accept and maximize an imbalanced schedule:

1. Stop and breathe. Balance is an illusion in our external lives, Hawkes says, but it can be created internally as a mechanism that gives busy people the ability to cope better with challenges. This emotional equilibrium is a measured thought choice that gives us more control of our responses to situations. “When I catch myself reacting,” Hawkes says, “I stop and ask, ‘What am I telling myself? Is it true or head trash?’ This helps me unravel what’s factual from a kneejerk emotional response based in fear. I stop and breathe until I find my internal balance again.”

2. Learn to say no. “Every time you say yes to something, you’re also saying yes to much more,” Hawkes says. “Tell them you’ll consider, but first sit down with a pad and pencil and list all those additional things you’re taking on by saying yes. Finding balance is a matter of saying yes and no to what fulfills you and your life without overcommitting.”

3. Don’t be afraid to follow. A leader empowers others by giving them space to lead or take a larger role, thus lightening the leader’s load. “You can’t always make things happen, and you can’t do it all,” Hawkes says. “At times you have to let go and let others take the lead.”