



The Update

Risk Management for you and your Practice

The Eternal Balancing Act

Balance. Without it, we can't stand up much less walk, ride a motorcycle, or ski. Likewise, without balance in our personal and professional lives, things tend to go sideways.

We constantly make choices about allocating our most precious resource, time. The more conscious and informed these choices, the less stressed and more productive we will be. So let's ask and answer some of your questions about balance.

What do you mean by Balance?

Picture a giant pie divided into 24 slices of one hour each. Sleep occupies a chunk of those slices; the remaining hours are allocated – either by choice or default – to the other categories you have or want in your life. Those categories might include Work, Family, Friends, Life Maintenance, Exercise, Recreation, Spiritual Pursuits, and so on.

Everyone has a pie. The categories and number of slices you choose are an individual matter. In other words, there is no moral imperative requiring you to allocate an absolute number of slices to various categories of your day. For example, some people require eight hours of sleep while others need only six. The person next door might accomplish work in seven hours that takes you ten. We're all different.

We get into trouble when our needs or values don't match our time allocations. For example, if you need nine hours of sleep and routinely get five, you'll eventually get sick. If influencing your children positively is

important to you but you rarely see them, internal conflict will develop because your values don't match your behavior. If you need to work ten hours per day to keep your practice healthy but are spending only five, it will struggle to survive.

You see the problem: when we don't allocate time for the things we need and value most, conflict arises. Imbalances in major life areas create stress and dis-ease.

How can I tell if I'm out of balance?

Problems tend to pop up when we're out of balance. Examples – complaints from significant others; kids act out; bills aren't sent out, leading to financial problems; friends stop inviting you to do things.

Burnout and other symptoms of disease can also emerge. Examples – you may find yourself: dreading going to the office; unable to listen to phone messages; missing deadlines; receiving (or ignoring) angry calls from clients. You may: use alcohol or prescription drugs to relax or cope; gain or lose weight; sleep too little or too much; stop caring or worry constantly.

These are all warning signals, information to you that something is seriously amiss. Don't ignore them – they can save your practice and even your life.

How can I possibly achieve a balanced life when work takes all my time?

Use your calendar to block out times to attend to whatever is being

neglected, be it personal or professional. Calendaring events can be more effective than generating a lengthy to-do list.

Plan and calendar non-work activities in small increments. We tend to think that we have to block out big chunks of time for things like exercise or recreation, for example. Then we judge this use of time as impractical or irresponsible and therefore never get around to spending any time at all on these activities.

Instead, figure out ways to give yourself mini-breaks throughout your day and week. Ten minutes of exercise, walking the dog, having coffee with a colleague, or playing the guitar are much better than zero minutes.

Identify your Time Thieves. Some lawyers spend the first couple of hours at their desks reading the New York Times, playing solitaire, surfing the Internet, or reading email. These activities, while not necessarily unwholesome in their own right, have Time Thief potential. How can you tell if an activity is productive or a Time Thief?

Time Thieves usually serve a covert purpose. Often this purpose is **avoidance** of the work that really needs to be done. Consciously, we feel entitled to engage in Thief behavior – we feel we need to be informed, ease into our day, or have some fun before the real work begins. Unconsciously, we may be hiding from ourselves or others.

The bottom line is this: any activity

that derails you from your intention for the minute, hour, or day is probably a Time Thief. The time you lose to these activities has to be added onto your day somewhere, sometime. The more you are able to minimize or eliminate your particular Time Thieves, the more time you have to devote to both work and non-work activities.

What are some obstacles to balance?

We create many obstacles between our ears in the form of **beliefs and rules** we were taught or made up on our own. Think for a moment about messages you received from parents, teachers, employers, etc. about Work and Career, or conclusions you've drawn from your own experience. Here are a few examples:

- No pain, no gain
- Work is called work for a reason
- You have to work hard to get ahead

Again, there's nothing wrong, necessarily, with any of the ideas above. Problems crop up when we are unaware of our motivations and the beliefs that drive our everyday decisions.

Isolation is another obstacle to balance in that the less contact we have with our peers and families, the more skewed our point of reference can become. Isolation is an occupational hazard for lawyers, especially solo practitioners. It's easy to forget what "normal" people do in their lives when you and your peers are working 12 hours a day.

Difficulty setting and maintaining limits. Managing relationships with clients is key to a sane, healthy practice and life. Can you say no when it's in your best interest to do so? Some examples of setting boundaries:

- Limiting your phone and email availability after hours
- Limiting the amount of time you spend with clients on the phone
- Limiting the number of times in a day that you check email

Inattention to other life aspects that compete for your time and attention.

Areas that need your attention may include:

- Parenting
- Elderly parents
- Pre-existing emotional or physical problems

Most relationships need maintenance – regular attention, care, and feeding. While you can't factor in unpredictable crises, you *can* schedule time and routines for the people who matter the most. If you or someone close to you has a chronic condition, try to factor in time and money needed to work with that condition. Regular attention can help prevent crises.

Trying to do too much. Sometimes the only antidote to doing too much is – do less. Our culture leads us to believe that we can have or do anything if we just work hard enough. However, the cost of working hard can outweigh the benefit after a certain point. You may find it enormously relieving to scale back your expectations. Maybe you really can "have it all" – just not all at the same time.

Actually, too much work isn't my problem. I'm not putting in enough hours to make a living.

You may have fallen victim to the deadly 3 Ps: Perfectionism. Procrastination. Paralysis.

Perfectionism often leads to overwork – continuing to slave over something long past the point of diminishing returns. However, it can lead to avoidance if you aren't sure how to proceed with a project and you're afraid of doing it imperfectly. This leads us to the second P.

Procrastination is avoiding doing what we need to do. Avoidance occurs because the task at hand is novel or difficult and we're not sure how to proceed. It also occurs when a task is tedious, such as entering time for billing purposes. We naturally avoid that which we find scary or unpleasant. Which brings us to our final P.

Paralysis is stuckness. It's the pile of files in the corner that you really need to get to but don't. It's the unreturned messages piling up or the unopened mail on your desk. Paralysis is about fear. Deal with the fear and you reduce the paralysis.

If the 3 Ps aren't the problem, **something else may be going on.** Common culprits:

- Physical or emotional issues
- Permeable boundaries that allow other life elements to impinge on work time
- Insufficient marketing – too few clients, not enough work
- Your heart isn't in it

I've tried to achieve balance, but my efforts aren't working. What's wrong?

Maybe nothing is wrong. If your practice is in a phase that is particularly needy or demanding, it may truly require more time than you would like. If this is the case, try to implement best practices, and enjoy this phase of your business as best you can.

If the above does not apply, some **other possibilities** include:

- An underlying belief that you must work all of the time
- Chronic anxieties about money
- You don't know what to do when you're not working
- You're avoiding "having a life"
- A belief that taking care of yourself is optional or extravagant

The Lawyers Assistance Program (LAP) is available to help with issues like those above. If you or your practice is experiencing stormy times, don't hesitate to call 206.727.8268 for a confidential consultation.

By Rebecca Nerison, PhD - LAP Licensed Psychologist. Condensed from chapter submitted for publication in Up and Running: Operating Instructions for the Small Law Office published by WSBA LOMAP.

Welcome to Dr. Dan Crystal



Dan is the newest member of the Lawyer Services Department team. Peter Roberts of the Law Office Management Assistance Program recently interviewed Dan for this issue of Update.

1. Tell me about yourself.

I'm really relatively new to the Seattle area. I really enjoy the natural environment here in the Northwest. I'm from the suburbs of New York City originally. In my twenties I did video editing for television. I worked with NBC, PBS, and Comedy Central to name just a few. But working behind a computer was not what I wanted for a career, so I moved to Colorado to get my doctorate in psychology. I remain a film lover and might start doing film reviews once again.

2. I heard that your dad is a lawyer. Is that why you came to the WSBA?

Not exactly. My father does really enjoy real estate law, so I have a positive impression of the profession from him. It's really that I've been working with severe forms of mental illness and wanted to try working with a broader population. I know that lawyers are faced with real challenges and stressors that come with the terrain. I'd like to give lawyers room to explore these issues rather than to just react.

3. What do you do in your free time?

I enjoy trail running and I run races. I'm a diehard skier--both downhill and cross country. The local music scene is another interest of mine.

4. Tell me about your job here at the WSBA.

I do the evaluations for the diversion program through the Office of Disciplinary

Counsel. In addition I provide individual and group therapy through the Lawyers Assistance Program.

5. Other thoughts?

Outreach to our members is so important. I'd like to dedicate a good chunk of my time to encouraging lawyers who may not know about LAP to come in and meet with us. I also want to create a community that integrates lawyers with our peer counselor network, as well as community providers.

Thank you Dan and welcome aboard!

Save the Date

April 17 — 19, 2009

LAP/LaSD Statewide Conference

Campbell's Resort, Lake Chelan

Tentative Schedule

Day	Time	Description
Friday, April 17, 2009	6pm—8pm	Dinner—Speaker
Friday, April 17, 2009	8pm—10pm	AA Meeting
Saturday, April 18, 2009	7:30am—8:30am	Breakfast/CLE Presentation
Saturday, April 18, 2009	8:30am—12pm	CLE Presentations
Saturday, April 18, 2009	12pm—1pm	Lunch/CLE Presentation
Saturday, April 18, 2009	1pm—4pm	CLE Presentations
Sunday, April 19, 2008	8am—9:30am	Breakfast/CLE Presentation
Sunday, April 19, 2008	9:30am—12pm	CLE Presentations

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Happy
Holidays

from the

Washington State Bar Association's
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We're Going Green!

This is the final Update issue we will print and disseminate by mail. This and future issues can be found on the WSBA web site at <http://wsbalap.org>. If you would like to continue receiving the Update by mail, please call Peggy at 206.727.8268 and leave your full name and address. Thank you for helping us conserve resources!