

15 tips & challenges for a better work-life balance

You have taken the first step towards a better work-life balance. Great!

This document contains 15 tips and related challenges that help you realize your professional and personal ambitions in a balance that suits you.

Don't be too hard on yourself and don't try to start with them all immediately.

Choose 2 or 3 tips which you will benefit most from at this moment. Hang on to them for a month. After this period, you'll notice that they cost you less effort. You are on your way to a structural change!

Try keeping up for another month, because on average it takes 66 days to develop a new habit.

On the last page you'll find a practical summary that you can put in your bag or pin on the fridge. Perhaps your partner can take some advantage of it too ☺?

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Go for it!
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1. Make a team with your partner

Research shows that in The Netherlands women look after their children more than twice as often than men. Although male contribution to the household has increased in recent years, women still do 20% more.

What about your situation? Do you share domestic tasks, so you also have enough time for your ambitions?

I understand that this is not the nicest topic to discuss with your partner, so make it fun!

Challenge 1

- Plan a date night with your partner in a pleasant environment to discuss the care for your children and the chores.

2. Create a week plan

Although it might feel strange to think about the next week on Sunday already, this can make a big difference. It may give you more rest, because you consciously make time for the things that you find important.

Think about your priorities both at work and at home and how you can plan these most conveniently. Of course, some appointments are fixed (team meeting, appointment at school etc.), but you can think about how to plan its preparation. Don't forget to include in your week plan what you would like to do for yourself, and when and where you will need support.



Is this a week that will make you happy? Not quite?

Which energy drainers can be deleted or which activity, that gives you a sense of fulfilment, can be added?

Challenge 2

- Spend 30 minutes on Sunday to make your week plan and discuss it with your partner.

3. Switch off

Flexible working hours, made possible by technology, make it easier to combine a good job with the care for our children.

On the other hand, this has also created expectations of constant availability. Sometimes a working day never seems to end. Phone calls interrupt your free time and provide an undercurrent of stress in your body.

Therefore, it is very important to switch off your phone to make real quality time of your leisure time. Then, you won't be distracted by it and can fully focus on your son's soccer training, for instance.



Of course you can also apply this in your work to keep you more focused and therefore more productive. So you'll finish your work on time and you don't have to do anything in the evening.

You are the one who controls your devices. Don't just turn them on silence, but turn them completely off.

Challenge 3

- Turn off your phone at least once every day, so that you enjoy the specific moment more or be more productive at work.

4. Exercise for a happy feeling

Even when we are busy, we make time for the crucial things in life. We eat, we go to the toilet, we sleep etc. And yet one of our most crucial needs - exercising - is often the first thing we delete when our calendar is getting full. But exercise is very important to reduce stress. It gives your 'feel-good' endorphins a boost (yes, they are also in chocolate) and it distracts you from daily worries.



Besides it is important not to think of exercising as another stressy thing on your to-do list. Therefore, try to find an activity that you really like and won't take a lot of effort to make it part of your daily routine. Try to make it even more fun and easier by doing it together with someone else.

Challenge 4

- Spend 2 hours a week exercising.

5. Say 'no'

It is not easy to say 'no'. Yet we should say it more often, both in our work and in our private lives, to have more time left for the things that we really find important. I hear you thinking, yes that's easier said than done. But you can do it, too.

For example, at work you can say 'no' if you feel that:

- Due to a new task other important projects come under pressure.
- You are not the right person for the project.
- The deadline, due to other responsibilities, is not feasible.

Saying 'no' ensures that, in addition to your better work-life balance (which is also very important for your employer), you deliver your work within the set deadlines. In addition, the quality of your work will be better.

In your private life you can also say 'no' to activities or to contact with people that cost you more energy than you receive. For some, this may seem selfish, but it's not.



Just think of the flight attendant in the plane who explains the safety instructions: if a child is sitting next to you, first place the oxygen mask over your own head and then over the child's. In other words, the better you take care of yourself, the better you can take care of others who are dearest to you.

Challenge 5

- Say 'no' at least once a week to a request which is made or an activity that is planned.

6. Delegate where possible

Superwoman is a cartoon character and actually she doesn't exist. So instead of trying to do everything, focus on what you value most and which you are very good at. Try to delegate all other activities, both in your work and in your private life, and ask for help.

Discover what you can do in your work to let go of more tasks and give others opportunities to grow. They learn something new and you feel relieved, so that you can pay attention to higher priorities.

See what you can skip at home so that you don't do everything yourself. What help do you need from your partner, family or third parties (grocery delivery service, babysitter, neighbours etc.)? Which domestic activities can be done by your children, even if they are still very young (taking plates from the table to the kitchen, putting clothes in the laundry basket, etc.)?

Challenge 6

- Every week delegate 2 activities that will give you more space.

7. Say more often 'it is good enough'

Besides that you can't do everything, you cannot do everything perfectly. Striving for perfection can be incredibly frustrating and can even lead to a burn-out situation. Therefore, try to say regularly that what is done may not be perfect, but it is good enough to achieve the intended goal.



You can apply this to your own activities, but also to the ones you have delegated (see tip 6). For example:

- You have an important presentation in the morning. You have spent a lot of time to process the message in substantively good slides. You still find the slides in terms of layout not okay but you can say to yourself, "It is good enough!".
- You have agreed with your husband that he also does the laundry once a week, so that you have time for your yoga exercises. You notice that your husband hasn't put the laundry back on the right shelves. You could be a nuisance to yourself and do it again or you can say to yourself, "It is good enough!".

Challenge 7

- Appoint an activity every week in which your perfectionism comes into play and tell yourself "It's good enough!".

8. Take a lunch break

We all know the situation when we are eating our lunch behind our computer to get rid of those emails before the meeting starts. Your enthusiasm is to be praised, but did you know that employees who lunch at their desk, are less productive in the afternoon and make more mistakes than their colleagues who take a decent 30-minutes break?



Ultimately, your colleagues who take a break will deliver better work.

To get away from your work completely, you can also try to go outside and have a nice 30 minutes-walk with a couple of colleagues instead of having lunch in the building. You immediately start to move more and you build a good relationship with your colleagues!

Challenge 8

- Take a 30-minutes lunch break every working day.

9. Use calendar blocks

Do you also have those days when you feel that you've worked very hard, but did a lot less at the end of the day than you wanted to?

Get a better focus by working with calendar blocks in your calendar. Plan your calendar for about 60% with blocks, so that there is also sufficient space for unforeseen issues. At the end of the morning and at the end of the afternoon it is best to keep some spare time.

Blocks can be:

- Customer consultation x
- Working out customer consultation x
- Preparing meetings
- Email (no more than 3 times a day)
- Telephone appointments (group this)
- Lunch
- Administration

Etc.

For the blocks that have priority, you can use the 'pomodoro technique'. That means that you divide your tasks in tasks of 25 minutes. If you have a task that takes less time, then you combine a few. If your task lasts longer than 25 minutes, you can divide it into different 'pomodoros'.



Start working for 25 minutes undisturbed (with the alarm clock next to you) and you will do everything to realize your 'pomodoro' so you can check it off.

If the alarm goes on, you take a 3-5 minutes break. Enough time to give your brain some rest (eg get a cup of coffee) and to get back to work with the next 'pomodoro'. If your task turns out to last longer than expected there is no problem at all. Pick it up again in a new 'pomodoro' after the short break.

During a block it is important that you don't allow yourself to be disturbed by anything: no e-mails, phone calls, Whatsapp messages, colleagues coming in, etc.

Go on until you've finished 4 'pomodoros' (2 hours of work). Then you can take a longer break of 10-15 minutes. Exactly enough time for a chat with your colleague and a healthy snack.

Challenge 9

- Schedule your agenda with calendar blocks and apply the 'pomodoro' technique at least once a week.

10. Go to bed on time

The children are in bed, you've cleaned up the kitchen and done the last things for your work. How relaxing it is to watch an episode of that exciting series. I can't often stop after one episode and I go to bed later than I actually wanted. Recognizable?

On average, a person needs 7 to 9 hours of sleep to stay healthy. It has been scientifically proven that the consequences of chronic sleep deprivation are already noticeable when sleeping one hour less every day. It ensures you to have trouble concentrating on tasks, remembering things and making rational decisions. What would this mean for your work?

In addition, less sleep causes you to be more irritable, you have more stress (because your body produces the stress hormone cortisol), your chance of being overweight is bigger and your immune system weakens, so you get sick sooner. Not really something you or your family is waiting for, right?

Make sure you regularly go to bed on time. When you are in bed, do not try to look at your phone or Ipad either, because this blue light reduces the production of the sleep hormone melatonin in your body. So it will take longer before you fall asleep. Do you like reading in bed, go to the bedroom and take a magazine or a nice book with you.

Challenge 10

Turn off the light 3 days a week before 10.30pm to go to sleep.

11. Plan activities you like

Relax from the hustle and bustle of your work by planning fun activities. Giving yourself things to look forward to helps you to let go of your work.

This can be a fun day with your family, or you might find it much more relaxing to plan a night out with good friends.



Challenge 11

Plan a nice activity for the weekend.

12. Plan your end time and communicate it

How often does it happen that you've shut down your computer to go home and your colleague walks in to discuss something with you? That causes stress, because you want to catch your train or you want to be on time at the nursery.

Plan clearly in your calendar when you leave at work. It can help you to leave a part of your calendar empty for the 'loose ends' at the end of the day (see tip 9).

Besides it is important to inform your colleagues that you are leaving at a fixed time. For example: "I have to leave at 5pm, so if you want to discuss something with me, let me know before 3pm".

You'll notice that if you use this method a number of times, you and your colleagues will get used to it and you will leave your work on time and without stress more often.

Challenge 12

- Plan one day a week that you go home a bit earlier than usual and communicate about it.

13. Do chores at the beginning of the weekend

Instead of saving all your (often annoying) jobs for Sunday, do them as quickly as possible. For example on Saturday morning or even during the week. So you can, instead of washing, doing the groceries or cleaning up, do something fun and relaxing on your last free hours on Sunday evening. In this way you start your week with much more positive energy.

Challenge 13

- Do the fixed weekend chores immediately on Saturday morning.

14. Cherish the good things of working

A busy job occasionally causes you to feel guilty towards your children, you have less quality time with your partner, you see your friends less and sometimes you just don't see any possibility to exercise. You can get really fed up by that.



That is why it is also important to reflect regularly on the positive things that your job brings you. Think of your financial independence, the contribution you make to society, good contacts with colleagues, your personal development, etc.

It can also be something small which you are grateful for: a nice coffee-to-go on your way to work, laughing with your colleagues,

a compliment from your boss or 15 minutes of undisturbed reading that beautiful book on the train.

Challenge 14

- At the end of each day, consider 2 things why your job makes you happy.

15. Celebrate your successes

Some people find 'work-life balance' a misleading term because it would mean a static situation. Personally, I see it as something that is constantly in motion. Some days the scale is more on my work, on other days more on my personal life.

By seeing it like this, you'll feel less guilty if you have had a busy week or if your children are sick and you have to spend a few more hours at home.

Because of this continuous movement it is also nice to celebrate your successes. Because what you give attention will grow.

The deadline you have met for your client, the overdue administration that has been updated or a good final presentation that you have given. Wow, you can be very proud of that!



That doesn't mean that after a busy work week your guilt, about not doing sports, is suddenly gone, but you put it into a different perspective. You don't allow your annoyance, but your success to be dominating. How great is that?

Challenge 15

- At the end of the week, think of at least 3 things that you are proud of and toast to them with your partner or friend.

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