In the Balance

Hotel Management
Objectives

1. Understand what changes affect a work-life balance
2. Analyze the importance of balancing a career, family and leisure activities
3. Use scientific methods to assess stress levels
4. Implement stress management techniques
WLB or Work Life Balance is a concept in which people prioritize the various segments of their life, mainly their career, their family and their friends.

This does not mean that each part is equally balanced - each part wins over another part at one point or another throughout life.

A work life balance is an individual model, different for each person, based on their individual priorities and different lives we each live. There is no one size that fits all.
A Work-Life Balance changes over time and is based on our changing priorities.

It is sometimes different based on gender and the roles we play as males and females. Examples:
- Which gender is the primary money maker or head of household?
- Which gender is the primary caregiver for children or aging parents?

Other factors also change our WLB such as a change in marital status, single versus married or the start of an extended family with children.

Our WLB certainly changes based on our priority of wealth and it changes as we accumulate that wealth.

Age is sometimes the driving factor for a changing WBL. We are at the beginning of our career and striving to rise within our industry or are we near the end and ready for retirement?

Ask students:
What else do you think would change a Work-Life Balance? Give examples.
Work Life Balance – Why is it Important?

The benefits of a balance between our careers, family and friends has three main benefits:

1. Increased productivity
2. Improved mental and physical health
3. Increased morale

These lead to more career and personal achievements being met, more enjoyment for not only work, but also for a person’s family and friends and ultimately happier self.
So, how do you know if you suffer from an improper balance?

There are many self-assessments on the Internet and ones that can be purchased that people can take, but the easiest way is to look at four areas for signs of an improper balance, or imbalance, of work and life and assess yourself and your own feelings.

They are:

- **Health risks** – general health has been suffering, perhaps energy levels decreasing or fatigue increasing; for severe cases, actual illness and visits to your doctor.
- **Absenteeism** – increases in absences, both from work and from leisure activities with friends and family. These can stem from the previously mentioned illnesses or from over-attention to one area versus another. For example, you are absent more and more from leisure and family activities because you are so focused on work or other projects.
- **Burnout at work occurs** – burnout is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion typically caused by prolonged periods of stress. It causes feelings over being overwhelmed and helpless; feeling like you can’t give any more.
- **Increase stress levels** – improper balance can also lead to increased levels of stress often a feeling of pent-up frustration occurs, anger and even physical symptoms occur such as headaches and high blood pressure.
Have no fear, there are ways to manage an imbalance with the various segments in your life and to gain a better balance. A large portion of this balance act lies in managing your time.

Five common practices to manage time better are:

- **Learn to say no** – even if that is “no, not at this time, how about next month”
- **Stay flexible** – things happen and always will. Fighting those interruptions can cause undue stress when there is nothing to stop changing priorities. Learn to adapt to change - it will take practice.
- **Break up large tasks** into smaller tasks that are easier to accomplish in short amounts of time.
- **Learn to delegate** - You don’t always have to be a boss to get someone else to help with a work load.
- **Set achievable goals** - Set goals you know you will be able to make. You will feel like you are accomplishing more and be rejuvenated as the goals are met.
Earlier we mentioned stress as a sign of an imbalance in the various segments of your life. Even when you have achieved a better balance between career, family, friends and leisure activities, stress still manages to creep into our daily lives. There always seems to be times when there are not enough hours in the day.

Stress is also caused by events that we cannot control, such as bosses come and go at work, a fight with another family member, illness or death of a love one, friendship and relationship break-ups, divorces of parents, promotion lost at work and countless others.

There are other causes of stress, those specifically related to the hotel industry. The hotel industry, and others like it, bring a unique set of job responsibilities that can easily cause stress on top of a normal daily life routine.

Some of those hotel career related include:
- Long work hours – hotels must be staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Unusual hours – night shifts, swing shifts
- Poor working conditions such as kitchens with poor air conditioning or poor ventilation
- Relocation to another hotel
- Fast-paced work
- Demanding or irritated guests
- A variety of jobs or tasks to perform (not the same on any given day)
- Difficult and/or dangerous tasks
- Juggling different tasks at the same time
However, there are ways to negate some of the effects of that stress, regardless of the cause, so that we can maintain a healthy mind and body even in stressful situations.

Some of those coping mechanisms are:
- Learn to leave work at work and home at home so that “stress spill-over” is minimized and we are not bringing stress to others
- Get plenty of sleep and rest
- Eating healthy and not skipping meals
- Physical exercise also helps rid the mind and the body of stress
- Schedule your time and stick to it

Can the class think of other ways in which to manage stress in a healthy way?

What are some of the ways you deal with stress?
References and Resources

Images:
- Microsoft Office Clip Art: Used with permission from Microsoft.

Textbooks:

Websites:
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services
  - Stress-o-Meter is a short quiz for kids designed to profile your personal stress level.
    - http://www.bam.gov/sub_yourlife/yourlife_stressometer.html

YouTube™:
- Mobile Art Hanging in the Balance
  - Brainerd Newscast – In Focus Feature
    - http://youtu.be/zGbali-n72g