

# balance is NOT bunk

My son-in-law likes to stir the pot. He certainly stirred my pot about ten days ago when he e-mailed me from Geneva, and attached an article from *Fast Company* entitled "Balance is Bunk."

The article proceeds initially to portray balance in executives' lives as some sort of Caspar Milquetoast state where weak smiles and satisfactions are substituted for a sense of passionate devotion to achievement and accomplishment, or for single-minded pursuit of "success," or at least successful project completion.

As a former CEO, I know that sometimes circumstances require that overall balance needs to be shelved in the interest of accomplishment. As a coach I ask the question, "Does it really?" This column is about that tension, which CEOs have to deal with all the time.

One of the first things I do in a coaching relationship is have my clients complete the following Wheel of Life:

I ask them to rate their current satisfaction on a scale of one to ten (with ten being the highest) on this wheel, and then ask them to explain what accounts for that level. In the process clients sometimes separate their ratings of satisfaction with **friends** from **satisfaction with family, business** from **career, fun** from **recreation**, and yes, **significant other** from **romance**. Also, home environment often receives a separate rating from office environment.

After this process is completed, I ask each client to go around the wheel again and tell me what a "ten" looks like in each category. Then I ask who they need to be and what they need to do to get there; in other words, to have a "ten" life in all respects.

Some people look at me at this point and ask, "Are you kidding?" I respond, "Not at all." They say, "But I couldn't have *all* these things at once!"

At this point I ask them to give me a list

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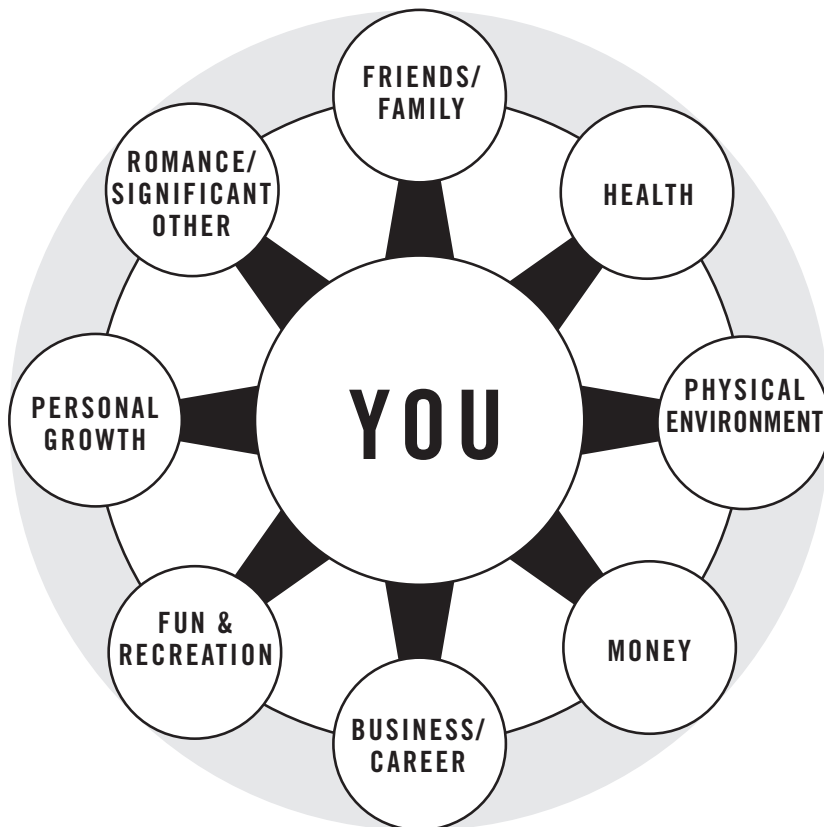


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of ten to twelve values, like integrity or honesty, by which they run their lives, and to give me a one or two sentence definition of what each value means for them. This part of the orientation is critical because in making choices to increase their overall satisfaction with their lives, honoring their values at each choice-point is key. While they may very well have to give up or exchange things (and associations or relationships) to achieve more satisfaction, honoring their values in the process will assure that accomplishments and achievements will not seem empty in the end.

The key role of value-identification and honoring is what is ignored in the *Fast Company* article. Values act as a flexible, dynamic mediator and arbiter among the often apparently conflicting claims upon a CEO's life.

So you say, "Caskey, this is all well and good, but what you're forgetting is my *primary* responsibility as CEO to my shareholders, employees, customers and community. I've *got* to give this preeminence while I sit in this chair. Later, I can get to more per-



sonal satisfactions.”

Well, perhaps. But by that attitude, however noble and lofty, how much are you giving up? You may be depriving yourself of sixty to seventy-five per cent of the satisfactions portrayed on the Wheel of Life. How long can you do that without having the wells in those areas of your life dry up completely? Won't you then have forever sacrificed that preciousness of yourself on the loftier altar of corporate responsibility, or the less lofty altars of power or greed?

So, you admit “Some balance is required for a fulfilling life, but I need to pay close attention to the business during this industry downturn [or rapid expansion, etc.]” True, and the question is, how can you plan/organize/delegate so that even *in this period* you do not abandon pursuit of goals in other areas of your life that you hold so dear.

Down-pedaling and short term deferral is one thing. Abandonment is completely something else. A basic part of yourself gets left behind in the dust and becomes lost in the trash heap of discards from your life - the lost dreams of youth, the treasured ideals buried in the morass of “reality.”

So you ask “What does this ‘balanced’ approach give me?” It helps you become more authentic as you more fully inhabit all areas of your life. And the ring of more authenticity enters all areas of your life, including your relations with stockholders, employees, customers and community.

You know well the old sales saying that people buy the “who” and not the “what.” So people across the business area of your life, sensing your authenticity, “buy” you and what you're saying more. This markedly improves chemistry - that will-o-the-wisp, priceless glue of relationships between you and your various business constituencies.

You don't have to try so hard - you relax and you're more available to confront and deal with those external situations which require your attention.

You also become a more interesting person, to yourself and others. As those neglected facets of your life emerge from the ground of your being, you become more expressive and experience the joy of observing the fruits of your self-expression in more and more areas of your life. And so fulfillment takes on new meanings.

And you're also open to the dynamism of

life and your life, so you don't get stuck in a particular status or role, but are always alert to what's coming to the surface from within, ever-changing fulfillment of your values as they themselves evolve.

Far from being “bunk,” values-based balance is the key to ever-continuing fulfillment throughout life, an effervescent source of authenticity and, ultimately, an effective life.

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