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# SmartBusiness

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## Finding your balance

How to live your life with purpose

**R**ecently I had lunch with Susan, a successful managing partner at a large financial services firm.

After she recounted closing a major deal with a new client, celebrating her 10th year of marriage, becoming president of her nonprofit association and agreeing to serve as room mother for both of her kids' classes, she paused and looked at me with eyes filled with tears.

"I'm exhausted," she said. "I feel like I'm running as fast as I can, but I'm not really getting anywhere. I'm not sure what it all means anymore."

Her story illustrates a key lesson for all of us. We can live our lives doing all the "right" things all the time. We can fill our days with endless good works, selfless dedication to our family and our causes, and a desperate need to say yes to every request. And yet, we never stop to ask ourselves the most important question underlying every activity in life: Why? Without this answer, even the noblest of activities can lose their meaning and leave us lost and exhausted.

Here's a simple exercise that can bring profound insight. On the left side of a page, list every activity in which you engaged in the past seven days and the amount of time you spent doing it. I know this can be tedious, but be sure to include everything.

Now, use the right side of the page to define why you did each of these things. You don't need to write a long explanation, but be candid with each answer.

How many times did you have to really think to answer the question of "Why?" For

### Jim Huling The Business of Life

any of these activities, did you have only a surface-level answer such as, "Part of my job," "Needed the money," or "Somebody had to do it?" An even clearer picture will emerge if you have the self-honesty to take this exercise a step further.

Beside each activity, write one of two letters — "O" to indicate an obligation, "P" to indicate that the activity is something you choose freely as a part of your purpose in this area of life. Once you've done this, you can sum up the total time you're spending fulfilling your obligations, as opposed to living out your purpose.

Don't misunderstand me. I am in no way implying that you should immediately drop all the activities you do out of obligation. In this exercise, we're only trying to illustrate the balance in your life between obligation and purpose-driven choice. If the things you do out of obligation dominate your life, you can feel victimized and lost, asking, as Susan did, "Why am I doing all this?"

On the other hand, if you know what you want from your life, if a clear and compelling vision guides you, you can gradually begin to make the choices that fulfill that vision. The difference is not in the activities, the difference is in why you do them.

If too much of your life is filled with obligation, here are two questions you need to consider:

■ **Is this the life you want to live?** If not, then it's time to do the hard work of defin-

ing who you are, what you really want and what you are prepared to do to make it happen.

■ **Do you have the courage to redefine your life?** The hard truth is that many people don't. It's simply easier to abandon our lives to the frenetic, sprint-like activity that is demanded by all the external forces that surround us.

Tonight, I want you to try this exercise. When you climb into bed and finally ease your head toward your pillow, imagine that a simple question is whispered in your ear — "Was today what you wanted?"

Be quiet and listen. Your heart will answer the question. For many, the painful answer will be no. A few will know the joy of saying yes.

And this is the mission of The Business of Life, to enable all of us, from the heart, to know that we are living the lives we want, and to confidently answer with our own "Yes!"



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