Ten tips for fitting work and life together



Would you like to move beyond feeling stressed or overwhelmed by your personal and work responsibilities? Or learn how to achieve personal and professional success on your own terms? "Knowing how to manage the way work and life fit together is a modern skill set we all need to succeed," says Cali Williams Yost, an internationally recognised flexible workplace strategist and author of the books *Tweak It*: *Make What Matters to You Happen Every Day* and *Work+Life: Finding the Fit That's Right for You*.

This article identifies 10 of Yost's ideas for simplifying, prioritising, planning ahead, as well as small changes you can make day to day that will help improve your work-life fit.

1. Remember that work-life fit is unique for each of us

"Simply put, there is no work-life balance or perfect 50-50 split between your work and your personal life," Yost says. "If you do happen to hit a balance, you can't maintain it because your realities are always changing, personally and professionally."

There's also no "right way" to achieve a good work-life fit. Your goal is to find your unique, ever-changing fit, the way your work and personal lives fit together day-to-day and at major life transitions. Don't compare yourself to others. Find the fit that's right for you.

It's also important to keep in mind that during major life changes—such as becoming a parent, caring for an aging relative, relocating with a partner, going back to school, or easing your way into retirement—you may find yourself rethinking how you define success related to money, prestige, advancement, or caregiving. Throughout life, you may need to align and adjust your work and personal realities so that they match with your vision and goals for the future.

2. Harness the power of small actions or "tweaks"

Even small actions can have positive and lasting effects. When you're feeling overloaded, for example, commit to taking two or three small but meaningful steps towards a better work-life fit. Plan a long weekend away with friends. Clean out your hall cupboard. Take an online class to learn a new skill. Then do it again and again. Small actions can have a big impact on your sense of well-being and control.

To get started, check out more than 200 small, doable get-started actions suggested by 50 work, career, and personal life experts in Yost's book *Tweak It*.

3. Create a combined calendar and priority list

How will you fit everything else into your schedule on top of a busy work and home life? There's exercise, eating well, holiday, sleep, career development, time with family and friends, caregiving responsibilities, and just general life maintenance. You can't do it all. But you can be more intentional and deliberate about how you spend your time.

First, pull together all of your work and personal to-do lists and priorities into one combined calendar and priority list. This will help you determine how you want to prioritise the tweaks—those small, meaningful work, career, and personal actions and priorities—to add to your work-life fit. These small tweaks will enhance your well-being.

For example, your tweaks might include planning your meals and food shopping on Sunday afternoon or participating in an exercise class every Tuesday and Saturday. Or they might include researching a holiday one afternoon, going to the cinema with your sister, or attending an industry networking event. Building these actions into your schedule makes it far more likely they'll happen and you'll feel better as a result.

You'll find examples of the Tweak It Practice and sample calendars in *Tweak It.*

4. Take care of yourself in small ways

As indicated above, small changes can make a big difference in how you feel. Manage stress during the day by closing your eyes for 15 seconds and taking a few deep breaths. Try to eat more healthily by incorporating a vegetable into two of your meals during the day. Turn off the television and your electronic devices an hour before you go to bed. Doing so will help you get the rest you need.

5. Preview a skill online before you pay to take a class

In a rapidly changing world, we all need to continuously update our skills to meet new work and personal responsibilities. But going back to school can be expensive and time-consuming. Before you invest a substantial amount of money in a class, try to preview a skill online. Watch or listen to any of the hundreds of thousands of videos or podcasts on an infinite number of topics that you can preview by downloading or streaming them. Watch them while you're commuting, or listen to them while you walk. If you want or need more help than the video or podcast provides, invest in a class.

6. Collect ideas for holidays—then go on one

Taking a break to reenergise is more important than ever in our on-the-go world, and many people avoid holidays because they don't know where to go. It takes some research to find a destination that you can afford, and some of us tend to wait until the last minute. To get inspired, keep a jar or small box where you can store holiday ideas. Every time you hear a friend or relative talk about a fun and exciting holiday, write down what appeals to you about it and put it there. When you read an article about a place that sounds intriguing, put that in the box or jar too. Once a year, choose a holiday destination from all of the great ideas you've accumulated.

7. Get things done while you're enjoying family and friends

Cook dinner with your kids. When you prepare a meal together, you're also spending time together. Go for a walk with your close friend before work or a kickboxing class with your partner on the weekend. You'll not only be exercising together, but also spending quality time. When the holiday season comes, plan a cookie exchange and donate some of them to a women's shelter.

8. Have 10 technology-free minutes each day with your children

Give the kids time when you aren't distracted by technology or social media. Sit on the floor and do a puzzle. Ask teenagers how their day went, and just listen. Check your email only during specific times of the day, so you aren't always distracted when your children need you. Maggie Jackson, author of *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age*, suggests putting your mobile devices in your car trunk so you aren't tempted to look at them when you drive. When you're on the phone, turn around and face away from your computer so you aren't distracted by email. Looking away from the screen will force you to pay attention to the person you're talking to.

9. Plan for future caregiving responsibilities

Get a head start if you're taking care of a grandparent or may be caring for a parent or other relative in the future. Sit down with the adults in your life who may require care. Try to clarify what they want, understand their financial resources, and come up with a plan for meeting their needs and wishes. Try to include in the meeting any family and friends who form a broader network of care, so you don't have to do it all on your own. Don't wait for a crisis.

10. Keep on top of everyday maintenance routines

Clean as you go, so the work doesn't pile up. Put a load of laundry in the washing machine every day before you leave for work, and put it in the dryer when you get home. Keep a small bucket of cleaning supplies in the bathroom, and wipe down the shower, mirror, and toilet every morning. Set a timer for 10 minutes each

weekend and assign each member of your family a task—vacuuming, dusting, straightening up. Check the owner's manual of your car for the recommended maintenance schedule. Estimate when you need to change the oil, rotate the tires, and perform other necessary tasks, and write them on your calendar.