

Claire's Tips and Tools for Relationships That Work

August 2007

Life Balance May Be Closer Than You Think

Not all vacations deliver the decompression they promise. But last month's stay at Priest Lake, Idaho did. After a couple of days, I found myself in a truly remarkable state of relaxation. The resort was remote and rustic. You had to look hard to find something to do out of the water and we didn't see any reason to make that effort. We contented ourselves with swimming, boating, and jet-skiing.

For hours at a time, I really did forget there might be anything more important to think about besides making sure everyone had on enough sun lotion and reading my chick-lit novel. ("Shopoholic Takes Manhattan," highly recommended if you are in the market for pure entertainment.)

Once back home, I made a startling discovery. There are several beautiful lakes near my house. And I still have my bathing suit. There's really nothing to keep me from going on mini-lake vacations every week, except my own mind.

It's not that I never let myself play. But I could do a whole lot more of it. And I don't always have to have a child along to justify it. Have you noticed that we're much more willing to do something just for the fun of it, like hang out at a park, if it's for the children?

Sometimes real responsibilities get in the way. Last Sunday, I really did need to spend most of the day catching up on financial tasks. If I had put it off, there would always have been some back corner of my mind worrying about what was falling through the cracks.

But other times, the obstacles are really just mental baggage. I don't mean deep emotional wounds, just leftover habits from an earlier stage of life. There have been times in my life when I did need to drive myself hard, optimize every minute, even go without enough sleep. When life balance really had to be postponed. Getting a degree while working full-time comes to mind. If you've got kids under five or you're doing a medical residency, you really don't have time to take care of yourself.

But that's not my life today. I still have the habit of charging at the weekend chores with a heads-down, gotta-do-it feeling. But a lot of jobs on my to-do list are really preferences, not necessities. Yes, I need to clean the moss off my roof, but it doesn't matter if it happens this weekend or a month from now. These days, life balance *is* within reach. I just have to take it.

I'm pleased to say that last Sunday after I got my accounts in order, I did grab my suit (and a brand new beach book) and headed down to Lake Washington. Not a bad start, but it's not the same as taking a whole day off. So this Saturday, I've cleared the calendar for a whole day of play with my mom. O.K., we're cheating a little. We're taking my step-daughter and my nephew with us.

But I do get some credit. I'm going to ignore some worthy chores. My house needs vacuuming and my yard needs weeding. My garage needs a miracle. But I also need to have a summer. After all, there are only three more weeks left in August. If I don't enjoy the summer now, then when will I?

What's on your to-do list for this weekend? Take a moment and think-which tasks are necessities? It's only a necessity this weekend if not doing it will really cause a problem, like you'll pay a bill late or your child won't have the right clothes for camp on Monday.

Are you living with the habits from an earlier stage of life? Do you treat preferences like they're necessities? Maybe you can put off some of those preferences, instead of making the fun stuff wait-and wait and wait. Maybe I'll see you at the beach.

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