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How to Find Life-Balance

by [Beth Firestone](#)

The key is juggling five significant areas that comprise your life.

After 27 years of parenting, my house is emptying out. I'm down to one kid at home full time and one part-timer. It's not quite an empty nest, but almost. I have spent this year looking inward, seeking answers. Who am I now, if not a full time mom? What should I be doing with my extra time? How do I find fulfillment at this stage of life?

Many of my friends' daughters are busy "working moms." Those of us who were full-time mothers marvel at this generation's ability to balance so much. But are these amazing young women really balanced? Are they taking care of their own physical, emotional and spiritual needs? Their marriages? Their friendships?

An old friend of mine suffers from anxiety and depression. On the outside she has it all; successful career, beautiful home, happy marriage, successful grown children. On the inside she harbors an emotion she can't quite place. At night she suffers from anxiety attacks and can't sleep without a pill. She knows something is amiss, but can't put her finger on it.

How many of us secretly believe we could be happier? Some of us may wonder if our marriage or love life is everything it could be. Others avoid looking in the mirror at bodies too long neglected. There might be a dull inner pain because deep down we know we are not living up to our potential. There might be a feeling of emptiness, a lack of purpose, a longing for something beyond us. We may wish that life didn't feel so complicated and wonder if simple joy is possible.

My husband Marc Firestone, a business man and life coach, came up with "The Juggler," a simple, yet profoundly effective prescription for a richer, happier, more meaningful life. The key is balancing five significant areas that make up our lives.

Picture a juggler with five balls. Each ball represents a vital part of our lives.

- Ball 1 – Your Body
- Ball 2 – Your Soul
- Ball 3 – Your Family and Friends
- Ball 4 – Your Career
- Ball 5 – Your Community

As we define the five life balls, gauge how you are doing in juggling all of them.

Ball 1: Body

You know you feel better when you exercise regularly, but how often do we skip the gym or Spin class because of some supposedly more pressing need? What about sleep? It's well known that sleep deprivation affects our performance, mood and memory. Are you getting enough? Studies abound on the importance of not just eating healthy foods, but eating slowly and mindfully. Do you eat on the run?

Tending to our physical selves includes managing our stress. Falling into this category are vacations, hobbies and special interests that rejuvenate and relax us. Personally, if I don't exercise three times a week, I notice a difference in my moods. If I don't get 7-8 hours of sleep, I start forgetting and misplacing things. If I'm not careful about what I eat, I feel sluggish, even depressed. A trip to an art museum (and sometimes Bloomingdales) restores my balance perfectly! Nothing in excess, but enough to help me tackle anxiety and burn out. It's nothing we don't already know, but it's one of the balls we so often drop.

Ball 2: Soul

We know we're more than just a body; we are a soul. If you are overly preoccupied with your body, with work, with social



media, you're probably heading off an emotional cliff. Everyone needs quiet thinking time to reflect on the deeper purpose of life, otherwise we're just spinning our wheels, and for what?

The more time we invest in the development of our spiritual lives, the richer our inner lives and the deeper our connection to God. It might be making regular times to meditate and pray, seeking spiritual mentors, attending a Torah class or learning on our own. Sometimes our vacations and hobbies are nourishment for our souls as well.

When you drop the 'soul ball' you feel more anxious and afraid, even lonely. There is an indefinable gnawing deep in your gut. It's your soul whispering, *don't forget about me*. We need the soul connection to feel balanced and whole.

Ball 3: Family and Friends

Relationships need nurturing on a steady basis. Married couples need to recognize that having a good marriage takes a lot of consistent and smart hard work. If your marriage isn't getting better then it's either stagnating or getting worse. Do you make regular date nights? Do you think about your marriage? It's a dynamic entity, always moving, so make sure it's moving in the right direction.

Are your kids getting enough of your attention? Do you make time to keep up with good friends, siblings and close relatives? Have you visited or called your parents lately? If the important people in your life aren't happy with you or you feel like you like you're growing distant from the ones you love then you've dropped this ball.

Ball 4: Career

Jennifer Dulsky, writing in *Fortune*, asserts, "The whole concept of work-life balance is bull." She says that she is "still a parent when I walk into work, and I still lead a company when I come home." She says that she has made peace with this reality and has even "benefited from celebrating that overlap rather than to try to force it apart." In *Coca-Cola Journey*, contributor Teresa Meek reports that for Millennials work-life balance has changed. To them it means "not setting boundaries, and expecting the boss to go along with a work schedule that often shamelessly incorporates personal time – as long as the work gets done." Sean Bisceglia, a Coca Cola company recruiter, says Millennials are "able to toggle between spreadsheets and social media and they don't hide it."

The lines between work and other parts of our life are becoming blurred. We work at home, from our cars and pretty much anywhere thanks to technology. Millennials' propensity for flexibility reflects a desire for more life balance, which is good. Nevertheless, how many of us – especially those who come from the 'old school' – still put in a 50 plus hour workweek because we believe that success is based on hours clocked in? And even if the younger generation is 'celebrating' the blending of work and life, does this mean they are never clocking out? How does this affect them emotionally and psychologically? When I was a full-time mother of five young children and found myself snapping at my kids, it was a sure sign that my life was out of balance. Moms need to clock out too.

Ball #5: Your Community

Judaism teaches us to value going beyond ourselves, to help others. As Hillel said: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me, if I am only for myself, what am I?" Use your special skills, unique personality traits and talents to help individuals or organizations that help others. Become a part of a community of like-minded people, whether through your synagogue, school, or a cause you believe in.

We can be juggling the other four balls, but if we drop ball #5, or never pick it up in the first place, then "what am I?" If you really want to experience another dimension of joy, become a part of something larger than yourself.

Learning to Juggle

Defining these five life balls is the first step toward attaining life balance. Knowing what they are enables you to evaluate your life and determine which areas need refining.

The time we spend in each area is a dynamic variable that changes with us. Sometimes one area demands more time and forces us to temporarily release another 'life ball.' That's okay. Being mindful of life-balance doesn't mean you have to be superman/woman and do it all, all the time. In my own case, now that the demands of a full-time mother (my career) no longer take up the majority of my time, I am restoring balance by taking up new hobbies. (If I'd been juggling properly as a young mom, I would have found time for such creative outlets, and yelled at my kids less.) I'm finding new and meaningful volunteer work, walking and exercising more, taking more time to pray meditate and attend inspiring Torah classes, and spending more quality time with my husband, mother, grandchildren and friends.

Most of us are running at Olympic speed, rarely slowing down long enough to hear ourselves think. Thomas Edison said, "Five percent of the people think; ten percent of the people think they think; and the other 85 percent would rather die than think." Next time you're feeling out-of-sorts or depressed, take it as a signal that something in your life is out of balance. Stop and ask yourself, "Am I taking care of my body? Am I nourishing my soul? How are my relationships with the people I love? Does my career satisfy me? Do I focus on work to the exclusion of everything else? Am I doing something good for the world?"

If you can manage to juggle all five balls, you'll experience that rare commodity in today's world: [peace of mind](#).

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