

Finding that Work-Life Balance in Nursing Today

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WORK-LIFE BALANCE. Three words. Three words I never quite understood until I hit my thirties. You might think that by working three 12-hour shifts, you will have FOUR entire days off. However, oftentimes those four days or weekends, PTO/ETO time or personal days are not spent achieving balance. They are spent sleeping from the exhaustion of the consecutive shifts just completed. Exhaustion from the extreme acutely sick patient in room 2 or that disgruntled family member in room 5 and all of the tasks in between.

The balance of work and life is a concept that I focus on heavily with my senior-level students, in their final semester, prior to graduation from an Associate of Science in Nursing program. Work-life balance, from the very start is just as important as sterile technique, labeling intravenous catheter line tubing, and raising the bed to save your back. One must intentionally work to find the balance. Survival in the nursing profession depends on the ability to find balance. A nurse's longevity, happiness and career success are relying on this balance.

Cambridge Dictionary (2024) defines work-life balance as “the amount of time you spend doing your job compared with the amount of time you spend with your family and doing things you enjoy”. It is vital to note, that balance is different for every individual. What I think is work-life balance, might not be what others think is work-life balance. As healthcare professionals, we are often pouring from an empty cup. An empty cup that is bone dry from extra shifts, critical staffing pay, COVID bonuses, and whatever it takes to continue to be the best. One of the first things I teach is that money is not everything. Nurses do not come into this profession to become rich. Scheduling multiple extra shifts, although might be helpful in the short haul, can be a detriment to a nurse's overall health, wellness and work-life balance

As you sit and read this article, you may ask yourself, but how? How do I find work-life balance? Where can I find ideas? The answer truly is ... everywhere! A few places, just to mention are Pinterest, YouTube, TikTok, the local Library, Netflix, Barnes and Noble, the movies and nature. One must be intentional, pause and take time to find what positively contributes to your own work-life balance.

Ask yourself these questions: ‘What truly brings me joy? What brings me peace? What makes me feel grounded?’ As for my students, we discuss self-care. Caring for one's own self before addressing the needs of others. This might look like a house full of plants, nail appointments every 3 weeks, a

monthly massage, a girls' weekend, a trip to Silver Dollar City with the family, or even just a night at home under the stars or snuggled under your weighted blanket with the latest Colleen Hoover novel. It might mean craft night with your mother, playing cards with your siblings, and coloring in a sarcastic adult coloring book, bought from Amazon. This self-care might mean spending a Saturday browsing the aisles of Target, with your extra shot Starbucks caramel macchiato, by yourself. Self-care is something that must be tailored to you. Self-care is the starting point for work-life balance.

The goal to finding work-life balance is intentional practice and consistency. If that means making a bedtime routine checklist or scheduling time in your calendar for personal activities and appointments, do it! Do it and don't feel guilty saying “no” to that extra shift, because you already have a regular shift scheduled. A shift for YOU and YOUR WELL-BEING. Time for work is scheduled. Time for life needs to be scheduled too.

Work-life balance. I never quite understood until my thirties. Once I found it and began practicing it, I do not know if I could survive this profession and life without it. Work-life balance. Three little words. Work. Life. Balance. Work-life balance: it's a goal, a state of mind, a journey, a necessity for inner peace and an integral stakeholder in both personal and professional growth and development. 🌸

References

Cambridge Dictionary. (2019). Work-life balance-definition. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/work-life-balance>