

Managing Work and Life Commitments

Welcome to the deep dive. Today we're uh tackling something I think many of us face, especially those of you listening who are university faculty.

That constant juggle, right? Managing work demands and well just life without drowning.

Exactly. Feeling underwater.

Right.

So we've got some really helpful insights today from a publication called Level Up. It's a mid-career guide written by faculty specifically for faculty, which is great because it means the advice comes from people who genuinely understand the academic environment. They've been there.

Totally. And we're specifically digging into an article by Dr. Heather Hunley from the College of Communication, Fine Arts, and Media. Our mission to pull out some, you know, practical strategies, things you can actually use to navigate everything without feeling quite so overwhelmed.

Yeah. Actionable stuff. And you can find the whole level up guide on the Center for Faculty Excellence website, by the way. Worth checking out.

Definitely. The whole publication is grounded in like real experiences, not just theory.

Okay. So, first big idea from Dr. Hundley. She takes aim at this common phrase, work life balance. She calls it a misnomer,

right? And that really resonates, doesn't it? Because balance suggests this, I don't know, perfect static equilibrium, 50/50 all the time, which just isn't reality.

Not at all. Life's messy, especially in academia, right? You got the semester cycles, grading periods, deadlines, then boom, your dog needs the vet or family visits. It ebbs and flows constantly.

So, expecting perfect balance is basically setting yourself up to feel like you're failing

pretty much. It's an unhelpful expectation. So the question becomes, what's a better way to think about it?

And Dr. Hunley's answer is prioritization. But the order she suggests is maybe a bit surprising at first. Self, then family, then work, then other.

Yeah, putting self first can feel counterintuitive,

maybe even selfish in a demanding job,

right? Isn't work supposed to come first sometimes?

Well, what level up and Dr. Hanley emphasizes that focusing on yourself, your health, rest, Doing things you enjoy without distraction isn't selfish. It's uh foundational.

Foundational. How?

Think of it like preventative maintenance. If you're running on empty, how effective can you really be in the classroom or with your research or for your family?

Okay, that makes sense. So, it's an investment in your ability to handle everything else.

Exactly. Treat your well-being like you'd treat preparing a lecture. Block out time for it. Protect it. Don't feel guilty about it.

That's a powerful reframe. Okay. So, beyond that big picture. What about the day-to-day? How do we actually stay on task?

Well, she offers some really practical things, simple stuff, even using to-do lists, not just a plan, but to actually see what you've accomplished. That gives you a little boost.

Yeah, checking things off feels good.

It does. And setting small, achievable daily goals. She even suggests using your commute time for this. Break down those big projects, little steps.

Mhm. But also, and this is maybe the harder part, really knowing your limits, your bandwidth. and getting comfortable saying no when you're overloaded.

Has the power of no that's tough in academia sometimes.

It really is. But saying no to a new commitment when you genuinely don't have space is actually a form of self-care. It protects your ability to do your existing work well.

Okay. That connects back to prioritizing the self, doesn't it?

Then there's the other big challenge, distractions, especially you know our phones, email.

Oh, absolutely. The constant pings and notifications. Dr. Hunley points out, and research backs this up, that multitasking just isn't effective. We're wired for focus.

So, we think we're juggling, but we're just dropping balls slowly,

kind of. So, the advice is about using technology intentionally, not getting rid of it, but managing it. Setting timers for focused work blocks, reducing screen time overall.

Turning off notifications, that feels radical sometimes.

It can, but maybe just the non-essential ones. Altering settings, and don't forget low tech things, just shutting your office door

or telling colleagues, hey, I need an hour of deep work time.

Exactly. Communicating those boundaries. It's about creating space to actually concentrate.

Makes sense. And the final piece Dr. Hunley brings in, which feels really important, is self-compassion.

Yes. Honoring yourself with grace, as she puts it. Academia often involves high standards, and we can be incredibly critical of ourselves.

We definitely can. Impostor syndrome is real.

Totally. So, self-compassion means pushing back on that inner critic. It means allowing yourself to say no like we discussed or asking for help or even requesting an extension sometimes and reframing those actions not as failures but as uh necessary self-care.

Precisely. They're strategies for sustainability. And often you'll find colleagues are more understanding than you think. Plus, you're modeling healthy behavior for others, maybe even your students.

That's a really good point. Okay, so to quickly recap, forget perfect balance. It's a myth. Prioritize yourself. It's essential, not selfish.

Use practical strategies like lists and daily goals to stay focused. Be intentional about limiting distractions, both digital and physical.

And crucially, practice self-compassion. Be kind to yourself. Ask for help when you need it.

It's about navigating the demands in a sustainable way.

So, thinking about all this may be a final thought for you listening, particularly if your faculty dealing with these pressures.

What's one small step, maybe just one thing this week you can try to better prioritize your own well-being amidst everything else?

Yeah, just one small shift. It's worth considering. And remember, for more great insights from faculty who get it, check out the full level up guide on the Center for Faculty Excellence website.