

9 TO THRIVE

STRATEGIES TO BUILD A HEART HAPPY LIFE AND CAREER

for fundraisers by fundraisers

CURATED BY SHANON DOOLITTLE & BETH ANN LOCKE

HELLO THERE!

As a fundraiser, you work hard to change the world. And sometimes, that hard work can burn you out. Or keep you from your loved ones and friends.

You love your work. No question. But you also want to live a happy life.

So how do you balance both?

We asked fellow fundraisers the same question, and what follows are their tips. Some thoughtful, some actionable—and all helpful.

Happy reading!

Shanon Doolittle

WWW.SHANONDOOLITTLE.COM

TWITTER: @SLDOOLITTLE

Beth Ann Locke

WWW.FUNDRAISERBETH.COM

TWITTER: @FUNDRAISERBETH

Focus on what really matters to you and your family, then establish boundaries to protect those things that matter.

This means not being afraid to say no to something that at first glance sounds exciting but upon further reflection may not help you accomplish the things you've chosen to make a focus in your life. Know that you aren't perfect; you aren't super woman, super mom, or super employee. Give yourself permission to fail. And know tomorrow is a new day.

MICHELLE SANDERS BRINSON

*Marketing Communications Manager
Nashville Rescue Mission*

Plan and manage your time intentionally (including “due” and “do” dates) and then stick to your plan.

SUSIE BURDICK

*Executive Director
Kids Discovery Museum*

Forget balance. Seek to make honourable choices.

Only you can define honourable. It often comes with asking yourself hard questions about what you need and want, and what you've committed to give to others.

Sometimes honourable will look very balanced. Other times, it looks like missing the big gala because your kid has been barfing endlessly. And sometimes you miss the Christmas concert to meet the major donor.

And sometimes you'll need to miss all of it because your sanity depends on it.

Seek to make honourable choices, and surround yourself with people who honour your choices, too.

SHEENA GREER

*Boss Mama
Colludo*

Shanon and Beth, you're already doing what I do to keep from getting overwhelmed. You didn't try to come up with all the ideas for your conference session by yourselves. Instead, you reached out to colleagues for advice. Asking for help is the secret sauce that lets you enjoy what you do for a living and have a life.

DENNIS FISCHMAN

Chief Communicator

Communicate! Consulting

Meditation, the few times I've tried it, seemed to help. Working 7 days a week helps. Wine definitely.

TOM AHERN

Me

Ahern Donor Comms

I am a goal setter. I have a BIG goal for the year (one that would change my life or my career) and smaller goals for each month, week, and even daily goals... many of which are focused on getting me to the big goal. And, I write them down and refer to them every day.

I also integrate my personal goals and/or to do list with my professional one, so everything (or almost everything) gets done.

AMY EISENSTEIN

Consultant

Tri Point Fundraising

For me it's all about being grateful. Taking the time regularly to recognize the blessings I have in my life and not taking things for granted - I even created a Gratitude Jar.

Getting to work in this profession is also most gratifying and taking the time to celebrate the successes and what donors make possible for our students is absolutely key and so rewarding.

ADELIA MARCHESE, CFRE

*Manager, Annual Programs and Alumni Relations
Humber College*

Make time for yourself be it at work or home. Especially during those super busy times when it seems like everything feels like it's about to explode.

There's nothing wrong with closing your door, going out for a walk, or even making a lunch date with yourself (or a friend/colleague) to help bring things back into perspective and clear your head so that you can tackle the next thing on your list.

SYLVIE LABROSSE

*Manager, Fundraising
Community Living Toronto*

Balance? I'm still working on that one! My strategy in approaching work – so I can have a life – is to pace myself.

Of course, there's too much to do and very little time, so I'm learning to figure out what's truly important for our donors and focus on projects and tasks that truly appreciate and deepen donor engagement. And I'm allowing myself the time and space to figure this out. Years even!

PREETI GILL

*Manager, Research and Stewardship
Vancouver Foundation*

Communicate and listen with compassion, fervor, and conviction in all you do. When you do you're able to live through your values, convey your vision and appreciate the world we are all living in.

RUBY LOVE

*Managing Partner
VentureScale, SPC*

“Leaving work at work” is unrealistic for me so instead I don't beat myself up when I have to take work home. Instead I focus on what I'm doing at that moment and try and be present. If it's work then it's work. If it's play then it's play. I also try and change up my environments – working in a quiet place like a park or coffee shop.

MICHELLE VINOKUROV

*Director of Development
North York Harvest Food Bank*

I have three pieces of advice for fundraising consultants:

Be willing to take the lead of your clients. They come up with better book titles, training subjects, and content areas than you will! For example, my clients named my first book “Ask Without Fear!” It was MUCH better and much more succinct than the l-o-n-g names I’d created. And now it’s become a brand that inspire me and my family as well as my clients.

If you travel quite a bit, try to involve kids in your travel if you can. When each of our kids were aged 8, I would take them to a training gig. For one of my daughters, that was three weeks in New Zealand! The memories from these trips still fill our house with laughter.

Try your best to create a personal mission statement that includes career and relationships. And as you live out your mission statement, be sure to give some attention to the non-income generating interests. These help you remain human, interesting, and help you keep from driving your family and friends away from you!

MARC A. PITMAN

Founder

FundraisingCoach.com

Sometimes, to achieve long-term life/ work balance, you have to let things get out of balance in the short-term.

In 2014, I was diagnosed with a very rare form of life-threatening cancer. Balancing my professional life with personal life was simply not an option. I had to devote 100 percent of my energy to fighting for survival. So, I suspended my fundraising blog, canceled speaking engagements, and wrapped up client work. I put my full focus on kicking cancer's butt.

For many reasons, it was not easy to let go of professional life for most of the year. I worried about the financial implications. I feared I would feel adrift, that the market would forget me, that I would have difficulty making a comeback. However, spending my full effort on getting well has paid off. I'm now in remission. I have a bright future. I've resumed my blog, accepted speaking invitations, acquired clients, and started work on a new book.

By accepting that my life needed to be out of balance for a time, I'm now able to resume and enjoy a balanced life for the foreseeable future. Sometimes, we must accept short-term priorities that may compel imbalance in order to achieve re-balance in the long run.

MICHAEL J. ROSEN, CFRE

President

ML Innovations (and blogger at Michael Rosen Says...)

Remind yourself that your choice of “work” is not just a career but an extension of how you live your life. Be an example to your family and friends, not a victim of a grueling schedule and low pay.

KELLY HUFFMAN

*VP of Development
Safety Center*

Exercise before coming to work – I find that I have more energy for exercise and for work when I do it first thing. “After work” tends to get later and later and filled with excuses of why I can’t (tired, hungry, family waiting for me, etc.)

ANNE ADAMS

*Senior Donor Relations Manager
United Way of King County*

Everyone’s version of happiness is different, so self-awareness is really important. Know yourself. Know your strengths, your super powers, your value. Know what you love doing. And then go out there and get it.

RORY GREEN

*Associate Director
SFU*

I go out of my way to try to spend as much time as possible with my young daughters. Spending time with my daughters forces me to focus on them and not work. It keeps me from working too many hours and burning out.

DAVE TINKER, CFRE

*Vice President
ACHIEVA*

It may be frowned upon by some, but I work 40 hours a week. I work hard and get the job done – and done well. I encourage my team to do the same. We love what we do, but family is most important, so we work to live. Not the other way around.

ANONYMOUS

I try to have an exciting trip or experience planned at least once each quarter. It gives great anticipation, work ethic and lifts your spirits, even on some of the worst career days.

ANONYMOUS

I only do what I love and love what I do.

CLAY MYERS-BOWMAN

Consultant

Myers-Bowman Consulting

Look for inspiration elsewhere, and bring that momentum to work. I don't read business or fundraising how-to books nearly as much as I used to because it was burning me out.

Now, I'll watch documentaries, listen to podcasts or catch up with friends that energize me. The result is I can look at my work with fresh eyes and learn by doing.

BROCK WARNER

Manager, Development

War Child

Great childcare and a no meetings before 10:00 am or after 2.30 pm so I can still do at least one school run a day.

LAURA SULLIVAN

Consultant

The Desired Effect

Once you walk out of the office for the day, no more work! No emails. No calls. Nothing. I'm expected to give 100% to my boss at work; I need to do the courtesy of giving 100% to my boss at home - my 14-month-old son. Work knows this is my rule and they've called me out for breaking it on occasion. Work always needs to stay at work in order to allow me to reset.

KATE HEIDINGER

*Director of Development
Investigative Post*

Unless it's for a pre-planned event, I never work overtime. My day ends at 4:30 regardless of what I'm leaving undone. That might not work for my employer but it works for my family and me.

ANONYMOUS

My tip: dates with friends who are artists, to draw, paint, go to workshops, museums, bookstores, art supply stores – and natural history fieldtrips. All things I love to do. Sometimes, balance is as simple as dropping in on a local gallery for 15 minutes for a shot of color.

JAN HALLIDAY

*Development Director
Port Townsend Film Festival*

My wife and I are partners in our lives and truly support each other, whether in our careers or in sharing the load of having a newborn.

DAN BLAKEMORE

*Assistant Director of Development
International House*

The problem with fundraising is that you can always do more. So creating an annual work plan that lays out what your goals are and where you are going to focus (that ideally feeds into an organizational strategic plan) is key to helping you focus while showing your higher ups what your strategy is.

Also, in almost every case, it makes more sense to focus on major donors than on the Next Big Event – far more cost and time efficient. You'll meet your goals AND get to go home for dinner.

ANONYMOUS

I believe the concept of balance is changing. As if work and life are separate entities. Our life is all the things in it.

The win, I believe, is doing what you love and are passionate about. When we are doing that we are at our happiest and usually most effective. For me it is about living, period. We've been given one opportunity: We're All Here To Live Out Loud!

JAY GOULART

Chief Data Artist

NewSci, LLC

Invest in yourself and the environment you're in. It's ok to spend a little extra money to have serenity and happiness.

Also work in focused bursts when you're at your best. Spending time giving gratitude is some of my best time and refocuses me on why I do my work so I'll break through a tough project by writing a stack of thank you notes to refuel me.

LYNNE M. WESTER

Founder

Donor Relations Guru

I travel a lot for my work and one thing that makes it all still seem fun is taking time, even a little, to experience the local flavor of a community.

Whether that's eating at a local restaurant, visiting a local attraction, shopping at a farmer's market, or booking an adventure unique to that area (like the CN Tower EdgeWalk in Toronto, or an airboat tour in the Louisiana bayou), I get out of the hotel, get out of the meetings, and get a little slice of the personality of the community.

ALICE FERRIS, CFRE, ACFRE

Partner

GoalBusters Consulting

I think my secret is not a secret. You actually have to plan for balance and be disciplined to do it. I'm not a disciplined person, but I value having others hold me accountable to making sure my life has balance in it.

1. I plan exercise
2. I plan time-off
3. I plan daily meditation and quiet
4. I plan vacation and time off the grid
5. I plan specific time with my family
6. I plan time to do nothing

After all that planning for that, I plan my work. That helps me balance my life. In addition I have rituals that help me.

1. Before going to bed, I talk to the love of my life about my day and kiss her goodnight.
2. When i wake up, I always fix her a cup of coffee...always.
3. I have one cup of coffee while watching Peppa Pig with my 4-year-old stepdaughter every morning.

There you go.

JEFF SCHREIFELS

Senior Partner

Veritus Group

The concept of charity can burn you out on charity.

Make sure to volunteer in a physical role and opposite cause than the charity you're working for. When I worked in a small charity, I volunteered in events for a big charity. When I worked at a University was the lead volunteer for a small volunteer-lead charity. When I joined the bank in philanthropic advisory I joined the boards of a medium sized charities and ran social media accounts for four charities.

As the pendulum swings in your life, make sure one is swinging the opposite way to keep your fire and your brain engaged and in love.

AND network, network, network! Using social media (Twitter) to keep in touch with peers and help each other is a HUGE help to combat burnout and help through crisis.

PAUL NAZARETH

V.P. Community Engagement

CanadaHelps

I am eager to share my secrets (two of them) for balancing a happy life and a thriving career:

My EA, Theresa Horak, is my secret weapon. Taking full advantage of an assistant requires admitting two things: 1) that you can't do everything yourself and 2) that you may be good or even great at some things but others are better than you are at some things that are also essential to your success. Theresa saves me valuable time; she alerts me to opportunities and issues that need addressing. If you have the good fortune of hiring an EA sometime in the future, first be honest about your own personality and approach to business and then hire someone who is not like you. You and your EA are a team and two heads are better than one, especially if they don't think and behave in the same way.

I don't work on the weekend, no matter how much work is on my plate. My full and happy life on Saturday and Sunday recharge me, making me eager to get back to work on Monday and much more productive than I would have been had I spent even some of my weekend working. And, because I'm not arguing with myself on the weekend over whether I should finish that research study, or write another page or two of my current book, I don't experience the stress and anxiety that manifest themselves in counter-productive ways — disturbed sleep, exhaustion, poor performance during business hours. Work less and accomplish more; it took me decades to learn that.

PENELOPE BURK

President

Cygnus Applied Research, Inc.

One word, many options: Fitness. Every single day I believe that our bodies need to sweat and our minds need to clear. Finding exercise that you love and look forward to every day means you make time for it with a full heart and you enjoy every moment, coming back invigorated and refreshed. I do a variety of workouts, from walking to yoga to ballet to spin to weights to adventurous play with the family. Sweat every day.

But in all seriousness, even during our busiest times, we have created an environment where wellness comes first, and that means fitness for us. When I say to John, or he says to me, “I’m going to workout”, we never EVER stop each other.

That and good coffee. :)

JEN LOVE

Partner

Agents of Good

I’ve had to learn (and struggle with on a daily basis) to set clear boundaries of what time I work... and what time I don’t work. With social media, private messaging, smart phones, iPads, etc., it’s easy to continue responding to messages all evening and never really “turn off”. Put down the electronics, breath in fresh air, take a walk, talk to your family, leave work at work.

SARAH SLACK

Executive Director

The TEARS Foundation

The fact is... I am very bad at creating balance. The thing is, my life partner and I have accepted the reality that our life's commitment is the philanthropic work that we do. So for the Simone/Tom/Ahern/Joyaux household, "happy life" is this philanthropy stuff. Whether it's consulting or presenting or writing or....

BUT... AND THIS IS A VITALLY IMPORTANT BUT! I do need more balance. So here are some of my strategies / tips:

1. I do my best to end work and leave my office and sit in front of the TV. I have happy family memories of watching television with dad-made pizza and dad-made milkshakes. And analyzing movies and shows. (And my Tom guy hates it when I comment and anticipate.) And, at least twice/week, I make Tom sit next to me on our intentionally two-person couch and watch TV.
2. I read popular culture novels. (More colloquially called junk novels.) That's how I relax. I do that for 30 - 60 minutes before turning out the light and going to sleep. And sometimes, I go to be at 8 p.m. and read.

In closing, I'll be reading the e-book by Beth Ann and Shanon (alpha order) to try to apply some new tips.

SIMONE JOYAUX

Consultant, Author

Joyaux Associates

I used to be really good at balance, and have gotten out of balance lately. I'm working on leaving work at work and letting my home time be family time and relax/fun time. Specifically, I've stopped checking email in the evenings.

SANDY REES

Fundraising Coach

Get Fully Funded

Strong relations with Colleagues: internal colleagues in other departments are key to your department's success, whether it's the content providers, marketing or finance.

External colleagues from other organizations are your support system – for advice on new programs, help with templates and precedents, thoughts on prospective donors or volunteers – and if it comes to it – helping network for your career.

ANONYMOUS

I had wanted for years to cut back to four days a week, but kept resisting even though I had support from senior management. The truth was I wanted to do it, but didn't want to take a 20% pay cut. I felt that I was "worth it" from the standpoint of what I contributed to the organization.

Then I took a step back and tried to look at it from a management point of view. I took the plunge and I am SO much happier. Plus I work from home one day of the week. Since I write grants and do stewardship, it is workable. My role may continue to evolve, so maybe I will make up some of that compensation if my major donor development role expands.

ANONYMOUS

The tip is compartmentalization — when one approaches the bogeys and missiles fired in every direction throughout every day, one needs to take a deep breath and focus on what is the highest priority, understanding that the recalibration of all moving parts is something we must embrace, because change is a constant. in our journey, and as much as we organize, we need to know what are our priorities so that we may deploy our energy and resources with tenacity and forthrightness.

ROB PEACOCK, CFRE

Chief Executive Officer

Peacock, Inc

Gratitude. Learn to love it, learn to advocate for it, learn to find value in it.

The more you show, the better you are. Don't just practice gratitude – be awesome at spreading it.

Gratitude makes your donors give again (and more), it makes your communications worth reading and it makes your organization stand out. Gratitude makes your friends, family and life happy!

You have a special opportunity to make the world a better place.

Never lose sight of that – each day there is someone very grateful for the work you do.

SHANA RUFF

Stewardship Coordinator

Meritus Healthcare Foundation

Treat life as a project with two goals – personal and professional. Then set your priorities against those goals at the beginning of the year and revisit them every quarter to see if these goals marry.

I figured mid-year last year (2014), that while my assignment was well paid, I wasn't doing work that was aligned to my interest and skills hence my personal goals were in conflict with my professional goals. I was in a stage where I had worked for 9 years and still didn't feel I had found what I wanted to do long term. So I took a break for 6 months to reflect.

With my family's support, before the end of 6 months, I found a project where I personally related to the cause and professionally it was dynamic with lot of creative freedom. I thought that the break helped me in finding my mojo and strike the work/life balance that we all crave for.

SUDESHNA MUKHERJEE

Special Program Consultant

Self employed

I'm not sure I've figured this out. But I think that after many years being very driven, I just stopped trying.

I took about a year to really think about what I wanted. Then I became very comfortable with what I know, who I am and how I am contributing to the world, the sector and my family. The key difference, I think, is to stop looking for validation externally and start to be really content with who you are.

I love my work and helping charities transform their fundraising. Personally and professionally I have never been happier. Okay – I've also never been busier – but I love it so it doesn't feel like work. Also knowing I'm good enough, pretty smart and have nothing to prove – draws really cool people into my life. People who truly add value.

ANONYMOUS

It may sound simple...but be passionate about what you do. That professional passion will permeate into your personal life and will be readily noticed by anyone and everyone who crosses your path.

It changes your energy and people are attracted to it. And when people are drawn to it, you build relationships and new friendships – all while supporting the career you love and the personal life that must stay in balance. The great caveat is you move closer to achieving your fundraising goals. And so it goes... round and round and it starts with just embracing what you do and your life is naturally enhanced. It's a beautiful thing.

TINA SNIDER

Director of Communications

Ronald McDonald House Charities of Central Texas

Over winter break I made a conscience effort to disconnect from work and social media as much as possible. Even though I had my iPhone on me at all times, I only checked my e-mail at the end of the day after my boys were asleep in bed. Yes, it did mean I had countless e-mails to sift through by the end, it was just the recharge I needed to start fresh in 2015.

JOSH HIRSCH

*Director of Development and Chief Gratitude Officer
The Weiss School*

Respect boundaries, but don't be confined by them.

It's important to recognize what battles you can't fight, and save your energy for things that you can control. Burnout is inevitable if you try to do everything. Learn what you're up against and what you can handle, and demonstrate your value by delivering on what you set out to do, even if it is only a small thing.

ANONYMOUS

I think the answer to the balance question is very individual. In my case, I have found that the way to balance a happy life and a thriving career is to know myself, and to let that knowing be the touchstone for all my decisions. For me, it is not so much a matter of ensuring that I spend a certain number of hours doing non-work things vs. work things, or making sure that I don't work more than a set number of hours. For me, it is more about being clear in my own mind about what I love and what I don't love, and then trying to do more of the things I love and fewer of the things I don't.

It is an ever evolving process, and it is cyclical. If I love my work, then I love doing lots of it, and doing it does not feel like work. So I do it intensely and with abandon. It is fun, it is energizing, and it somehow results in a seemingly unending stream of creative new ideas. Then, when it starts to feel less like fun, I pull back on the extra work hours and do more after-work things, intensely, with abandon. I usually choose some new recreational activity to try, like rock climbing, kite surfing or maybe car racing, and I do that for a while. Then I repeat the process.

In this way, I am always fully engaged with what I am doing, and I never feel that I need to work harder at getting more balance in my life. It never feels like something is missing. The only times when things have not worked out so well for me, was when I lost sight of this, and I tried to do things differently. So, in the end, for me it is about knowing what I love and doing more of it. Everything else just flows from that.

ANONYMOUS

Over the past 15 years my focus and passion has been on building my professional life and that couldn't have happened without the incredible empowerment of my life partner David and our kids to support me to have more flexibility to travel and both be a consultant as well as volunteer with AFP locally, nationally or internationally.

In 2010 after having one of the busiest professional years in my life, I made an intention to begin slowing down and focusing where my energy and time was going. I began to ask myself what I was sacrificing to continue my high volumes of community service. I knew I needed to refine my focus as I was interested in making a specific impact with my volunteerism and so I started to step down from some of my community service. In 2012, I began a new role with Food Banks Canada and at the same time moved in the Vice Chair of Professional Advancement Role with AFPIHQ. 2012-2014 were some of my most intense years of my life trying to balance everything. Towards late 2014, I took some time to reflect in order to recalibrate my life.

I made a conscious decision to get centered again, putting my family first and slowing the pace of external draws on my time. I registered for an evening painting class, I see my new grandson twice a week, I'm planning my wedding and yes I am still volunteering, but I am not taking on anything new... for now.

My biggest learning is that all of this is manageable. It's about choices and timing and I've learned to be forgiving of myself as I've wanted to pursue my passions. My passions now are focused more internally on family, creativity, quality time with friends and having more time to reflect... but what's unknown is when that will change again and I'll be drawn into something new and challenging.

TANIA LITTLE, CFRE

Director, Development and Partnerships

Food Banks Canada



TAKING TIME TO LIVE LIFE WILL
ONLY INSPIRE YOUR WORK.

- *Unattributed*