

Padma Ramachandran

Ex-VC, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda

Achieving Balance in Life

Life is like riding a bicycle....you have to keep cycling to maintain balance, said Albert Einstein. The ultimate aim of life for each one is to be happy. For this we need to have a balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation, and fun – plus the resilience to take the good with the not so good, and accept what cannot be changed by us. So we need to cultivate equanimity in everything we say and do and practice values which will help us to take decisions with discrimination and care.

“Easier said than done”, you might rightly remark. But remember, each of us has tremendous reserves of power and capacity to control the critical factors related to pressures of time and stress on us—in fact many are able to turn such situations to their advantage. For them it is much easier than for others who have to put in greater efforts to cope with what is perceived as ‘bad luck’.

Just as there is no night without a day and vice versa, there is nobody who does not experience some stress or other in life. Even a new-born comes into the world crying—and if it does not cry, it is cause for worry. So the very first thing in our approach to beating down stress is to accept that stress is indeed a part of life. Acceptance of this fact leads to being ready to face challenges, pressures, and difficulties — call it what you will. It is like drinking tea or coffee- taken without knowing that it is very hot can scald the tongue or lips. . But if it is savoured slowly, not knowing how hot it is, one might actually enjoy it.

In fact without challenges, life would be most dull and boring. In the Olympics, it is said that those swinging on bars are given extra marks for introducing difficult, complicated and tough maneuvers. The Greeks say that it is the most difficult things in life that are the most beautiful.

With more and more new gadgets and technology, life is becoming very difficult for old and young men and women. One has to run with the hare and hunt with the hound. There are many adolescent children who are unable to cope with the fast pace that life has assumed. We hear of suicidal deaths of scientists and businessmen who have had to cope with more than what they can bear. And of the stress of women, who have to play several roles inside the house and outside and bear the yoke of patriarchal systems in society and hierarchical approaches at work. There are many physical causes of stress, but we do not go into them here. What we can however do is to find out the areas where we can control ourselves and our lives. For instance, being light-hearted, laughing a little more, or seeing the brighter side of things and being able to experience every moment, can make us feel better. Even simple lifestyle changes to bring in self-discipline in what we eat, how we exercise and keep fit and to have regular habits can change the picture. Being receptive to new ideas, accepting feedback about ourselves sensibly and with equanimity can help us see what others see in us which we do not, and help us on the path of self-correction or improvement in the way we work or understand things.

The beginning is difficult –but definitely possible with persistence. There is the story of the man climbing a mountain who sees a small stone on the way. As he looks at it, it seems to grow larger and larger and obstruct his path. That’s enough to make him conclude and tell himself that he cannot go further---until an old woman comes along and chides him, when she hears why he is moping. She lifts the stone and throws it away—telling him “It’s all in the mind , you silly man,

now walk and don't make a mountain out of a little stone like that!" Making a small thing bigger than it really is, has harmed relationships across the world and is the cause of immense stress, killings, suicide and bad blood.

So one of the lessons from this is to make oneself solution-oriented so that things can move forward. We can try to simplify, and not to be too sensitive like the 'touch-me-not' leaf, yet receptive to suggestions. For we cannot change everything to suit us. But we can certainly minimize the negative aspects of anything or event. So there is a prayer "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

One is reminded of the heroine Vivien Leigh in the last scene of the epoch making movie, "Gone with the Wind" where she sits on the stairway step and says she has to now start worrying. But, she says, why should I worry today-I will start worrying tomorrow. That tomorrow may bring in some cues for a solution, if not the solution itself !

And then there was that man who was fed up of worrying too much and getting stressed. So he wanted to appoint someone who would worry for him. He invited candidates, promising the lucky one a house, car etc. One of them asked him the question "Sir where will you get the means to give a house and car?" "Well", said the man "now that you are being appointed, it is for you to worry about those things"

Management of the pressures of stress and time could be called management of self. All religions and management books exhort people to understand themselves better before trying to pass judgement on others. Unless one manages oneself how can one be a good manager in life? Neither realizing areas of weakness and correcting them (a constant process) nor using our abilities to full potential can be disastrous - causing stress and strain and their consequences. So

it is important to use every opportunity to find out the good and not so good things about oneself. To keep growing, experimenting and exploring, is a must even though there may be risks in it. To nurture awareness, some people even maintain journals. Above all a deliberate effort to enjoy relationships has to be made—this is most necessary for maintaining balance in life.

For achieving balance in life we also need to have a road map of what we want to achieve, where we want to reach, by when and how--this strategy termed as 'strategic time management' has been found to be most useful for keeping ourselves focused on the steps to be taken, and by when (providing for difficulties to be anticipated) and how. Sometimes things do not go according to what we plan—and that must be anticipated and a second approach (maybe Plan B) kept in mind so that we are not thrown off balance. They say, "Plan your work and work your Plan".

Remember :

Stress is seen in all spheres of life, and at all ages and stages of life. The impact of stress is neither good nor bad—it is in the way we perceive the situation and act on it that it becomes positive or negative.

Good nutritious diet and healthy habits, the ability to enjoy one's work and relationships and managing one's time according to aims and values in life will help a great deal. They say "Be serious but light-hearted". An organized person can balance life better than a confused person, who is ever searching for things, wasting time and getting frustrated. "A place for everything and everything in place" is most essential for minimizing chaos, confusion and waste of time which could lead to stress.

Above all have a shoulder on which to cry when in stress or distress.