

SESSION 6: BALANCE AND RENEWAL

This entire program has been about what we can accomplish as we recognize our leadership potential, nurture it and then engage in meaningful places and ways to accomplish it. As we do this there are more and more demands on our time and energies. It may sometimes feel that no matter how motivated we are, how right the endeavors, that there is not enough of us to go around.

This session is about understanding that we are the keepers of our own well being. If we don't take care of ourselves, no one else will. Further, unless we are balanced we will sabotage the things that we want to accomplish.

Even with this program there are demands: attendance at the class, walk and talk sessions with our colleagues, membership on a board committee, planning and executing the class legacy project. You were selected for this program because those around you already had noticed your leadership potential. You are probably engaged in other activities that caused you to be noticed. Then there is family, work, church, etc. The demands are great.

In The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People, author Stephen Covey refers to taking care of yourself as “sharpening the saw.” The seventh habit of highly effective people is preserving and enhancing your greatest asset – YOU. It is renewing the four dimensions of your nature: physical, spiritual, mental and social/emotional. Sharpening the saw means renewing all dimensions. It means exercising all four dimensions of our nature, regularly and consistently in wise and balanced ways. It is a proactive habit because everything around us grabs at us to keep us from doing this.

The four dimensions:

1. Physical – exercise, nutrition, stress management
2. Spiritual – value clarification and commitment, study and meditation
3. Mental – reading, visualization, planning and writing
4. Emotional – service, empathy, synergy, intrinsic security

Physical Dimension:

This dimension deals with caring for our physical body – eating the right foods, getting enough exercise, making sure we have enough rest and relaxation. This is a high leverage activity because of the results that it gives us, but we have the tendency not to do these activities because they are not urgent. When we don't take the care to attend to these needs, the results can become critical as our health deteriorates and health problems become the result of our neglect.

From an exercise standpoint we are not looking for a major commitment, but just 30 minutes a day every other day. This seems a very small amount compared to the other hours in a week. It requires a paradigm shift to commit to this. Look for endurance, which comes from aerobic exercise, flexibility, which comes from stretching, and strength, which comes from muscle resistance exercises like using weights or doing simple calisthenics like push-ups or sit-ups.

Spiritual Dimension

Renewing the spiritual dimension adds leadership to your life. The spiritual dimension is your core, your center, and your commitment to your value system. Some will find spiritual renewal in prayer or daily meditation. Others can find it in great literature or music. Some can find it in the way they communicate with nature. In this dimension you leave the noise, stress, pressure behind and try to come back to your own harmony and rhythm.

Spiritual renewal takes an investment of time. Like physical exercise it is vitally important to our remaining centered but because it does not have urgency it is very easy to neglect. Yet, like physical exercise neglect can lead us to become out of balance and we can feel that our life and its activities are meaningless. Yet if we tend to this need in us, we grow to have a deeper understanding of our center and what it is that leads us forward. Spiritual renewal spreads out over all aspects of our life and is a refreshing experience that is vital to stay the course.

Mental Dimension

Most of our mental development and study discipline comes from our formal education. It is very easy once we leave school to let our minds atrophy. Many of us no longer do serious reading or explore new subjects in any kind of depth outside of our action fields. We don't think analytically and we don't write. In some of our houses the television is on 35-40 hours per week.

Continuing education is a vital for mental renewal because it continually expands and hones the sharpness of the mind. Sometimes this involves the external discipline of the classroom and or systemized study programs. There are many ways that we can educate ourselves.

It is valuable to train the mind to stand apart and examine its own program. That is real liberal education - the ability to examine the programs of life against larger questions and purposes and other paradigms. Training without education narrows and closes the mind so the assumptions underlying the training are never examined. Thus it is valuable to continue to read broadly and to expose yourself to great minds. There is no better way to expand your mind than to read great literature.

Another way to sharpen your mental saw is to write. Keeping a journal of our thoughts, experiences, insights and learnings promotes clarity, exactness and context. Writing good letters - communicating on a deeper level of thoughts, feelings and ideas, rather than on shallow and superficial events - affects our ability to think clearly, to reason accurately and to be understood effectively.

Organizing and planning represent other forms of mental renewal. It is an exercise in visualizing and imagining.

Social/Emotional Dimension

This dimension focuses on the principles of interpersonal relationships, empathetic communication and creative cooperation. The social and emotional parts of our lives are tied together because our emotional life is developed out of and manifested in our relationships with others. This dimension does not require the scheduling that the other dimensions do. We can renew this dimension in how we interact with others in our normal daily interactions. But, it definitely requires practice.

Our ability to do this well comes from our personal security. If we are secure within ourselves, then we can take the risk to reach out to others. Our intrinsic security doesn't come from outside ourselves. So it is not how others treat us or how they think of us. It comes from the script that others hand us. It doesn't come from our own circumstances or our positions.

A life of integrity is the most important source of personal worth. Peace of mind comes when your life is in harmony with true principles and values. There is security in knowing that you can step out of where you are and out of your own frame of reference without giving it up, that you can really deeply understand another human being. There is a security that comes when you authentically, creatively and cooperatively interact with other people and really experience interdependency.

There is an intrinsic security that comes from helping others in a meaningful way. One way to do this is in your work, another is through your community and association work.

Source: Covey, Stephen. [The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People](#). New York: Simon and Shuster, 1989. 287-307.