A Portrait of Balance: Personal and Professional Balance among Student Affairs Educators

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The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore (a) how student affairs professionals define the concept of balance in the context of balancing their personal and professional lives and (b) how student affairs professionals identified as "balanced" describe their experience of achieving and maintaining balance in their lives.

An increasing number of working individuals have become concerned with the "Holy Grail of the workplace"—the ability to achieve a personal/professional balance (Buckner & Sandholtz, 2003, p. 68). Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines balance as a "state of equilibrium or parity characterized by cancellation of all forces by equal opposing forces," or as "a stable mental or psychological state; emotional stability" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 2003). Kofodimos (1993) defined balance as "a satisfying, healthy, and productive life that includes work, play, and love; that integrates a range of life activities with attention to self and to personal and spiritual development; and that expresses a person's unique wishes, interests and values" (p. xiii).

Balance is a challenge for most individuals working in higher education (Tack, 1991). Toma and Grady (2002) reported that achieving balance in one's life "is often difficult but essential" (p. 97). Within our profession we serve as both educators and role models to students. Toma and Grady wrote that we bear a particular responsibility in "practicing what we preach" (p. 102) as we encourage students to think holistically about their development and lead lives of balance themselves. Student affairs professionals often assume many responsibilities within their positions, creating a high personal demand in terms of both talent and energy (Carpenter, 2003). However, as demanding schedules from work-related activities continue to mount, there is an increasing recognition and cognizant effort by student affairs practitioners to be more mindful of their obligations to *themselves*, particularly in terms of maintaining a degree of personal and professional balance (Amy & Smith, 1996; Carpenter, 2003; Toma & Grady, 2002; Reisser, 2002; Tack, 1991).

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Articles in many popular magazines, including *Time, Fortune, Ebony, Money,* and *Prevention* (Dollemore & Harrar, 2003; Fisher, 2003; Gilbert, 2002; Steptoe, 2003; Wang, 2003), describing the busy lives of high profile professionals, have frequently turned to the topic of balance. Most focus on interviews and profiles of individuals who appear to have attained balance and offer lessons on how others can achieve the same. The sheer volume of publications with strategies for achieving balance and avoiding burnout further identifies it as an important topic. The publications range from journal articles to self help books, all offering guidelines, models, and suggestions for achieving balance (Tarver, Canada, & Lim, 1999; Markel, 2000; Provost, 1990; Reisser, 2002). Many articles attempt to create a list of suggestions on how to solve the "balance problem," while others find a fundamental problem with the typical approach to the topic and propose alternative ways of approaching the issue of balance (Caproni, 1997; Kofodimos, 1993). Secretan (2000) reported that integration, not balance, is the solution!

Several articles were specifically directed at student affairs professionals (Amy & Smith, 1996; Bellman, 1990; Berwick, 1992; Toma & Grady, 2002; Wiggers, Forney, & Wallace-Schutzman, 1982), but contrary to the national trend, the student affairs literature offers comparatively little to practitioners interested in achieving balance as it relates specifically to their profession. Nearly a decade ago, Tack (1991) called for a shift away from the "workaholic" attitudes adopted by many individuals in higher education and toward a "work-to-live" philosophy, but our literature has not reflected this directive. This topic predominantly emerged in student affairs literature within the context of imbalance through research on stress levels, job satisfaction, "burnout," and attrition among student affairs professionals.

Burnout is defined by Freudenberger (as cited in Brewer & Clippard, 2002) as "the state of fatigue and frustration arising from unrealistic, excessive demands on personal resources and leading to physical and mental exhaustion" (p. 171). The challenge faced by student affairs professionals is that being in a helping profession makes it difficult to set limits. Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, and Kicklighter (1998) stated that

> Oftentimes, student affairs administrators embrace a "yes I can, yes I will" frame of mind and work ethic. This involves not delegating, becoming a mentor for all students and colleagues in need, not using the word "no" as often as they should, or feeling that sense of accomplishment is synonymous with exhaustion and fatigue. (p. 81)

Charlesworth and Nathan (1985) reported that higher education administration is "among the 12 most stressful occupations" (as cited in Tarver et al., 1999, p. 97), thus impacting the level of job satisfaction these professionals experience.

Volkwein and Zhou (2003) observed that "compared with other divisions, managers in student services report the highest levels of job stress and pressure" (p. 160). Though the specific issues with balance and job-related stress may differ for the new professional and the experienced practitioner, it is clearly an issue that affects student affairs practitioners across all levels. Multiple studies identified women, introverts, and young professionals as student affairs professionals that may be at high risk for burnout (Berwick, 1992; Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinowski, 1998; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Howard-Hamilton et al., 1998; Volkwein & Zhou, 2003).

Howard-Hamilton et al. (1998) evaluated the relationships between workload, burnout, and stress among full-time student affairs administrators and the correlation to gender. This study found that marriage and having children is more stressful for women than men. The observation is made that women outnumber men in the student affairs profession, but few attain top administrative positions. They suggest that women are "leaving the profession because it is difficult to juggle raising a family as well as working nearly 50 hours a week" (p. 90). Other studies (Berwick, 1992; Blackhurst et al., 1998; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Volkwein & Zhou 2003) also found that women tend to have higher levels of emotional exhaustion and stress. The impact of gender and outside family responsibilities is thus important to consider when approaching the topic of balance.

The particular importance of balance to the field of student affairs is clearly evident from the available literature. As Tack (1991) noted, the world of higher education tends to place extremely high, and oftentimes unrealistic, demands on the time and energy of its leaders. In maintaining this expectation this process may be driving away the very leaders that most campuses need. She further challenges individuals to "rethink work and productivity standards that cause a person to give up everything personal in order to be an effective leader" (Tack, 1991, p. 31). These limited sources within student affairs literature approach balance from a variety of angles, yet all advocate maintaining personal/professional equilibrium.

After sifting through all the suggestions and strategies on how to achieve balance, clearly there is not a "fix-all" solution. Kerka (2001) concurred that "defining what [balance] means is highly individual" (p. 2). Because balance is not a "one size fits all" concept, strategies used to attain and maintain a sense of personal/professional balance vary widely. Berwick (1992) also echoed the idea of how each professional "needs to determine which stressors are most problematic for him or her as an individual and which coping strategies are the most effective" (p 18). Each person approaches the topic of balance with a different set of "lenses" (Kofodimos, 1993), so taking a closer look at

individual perspectives on balance could shed important light on how definitions and approaches to balance vary.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative investigation of the phenomenon of personal/professional balance among student affairs educators. Qualitative methods were appropriate because (a) the phenomenon of interest is highly subjective; (b) context is important to the study; and (c) discovering meaning in the backgrounds, experiences, and strategies to obtain and maintain balance is a primary objective. Thus, the study is exploratory and descriptive. Qualitative research is most appropriate when the purpose of the study is to discover the meaning of a phenomenon, "how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences, how they structure their social worlds" (Merriam, 1991, p. 19).

Participants

Participants were 11 student affairs educators who exemplified personal/professional balance based upon nominations from other student affairs professionals. Nominations were solicited from professional association leaders in the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, the American College Personnel Association, and the Southern Association for College Student Affairs. Targeted emails were sent to executive council members describing the study and asking for a nomination along with a brief description of why the individual was being nominated. In addition, nominations were solicited through a conference presentation on this research study at the College Personnel Association of Kentucky annual state-wide conference. Slightly more men than women responded to the call for nominations, although gender representation among the professional association leadership was approximately equal. Virtually all of the nominators provided names of colleagues at other institutions than their own.

A total of 34 nominations were received from 22 nominators. An equal number of nominations were received for male and female student affairs professionals. The nominees represented 27 institutions including large and small, public and private institutions. Almost all nominees were senior-level administrators. Three nominees were nominated twice, and one nominator was also nominated. All nominees were sent an email that informed them of their nomination, explained the purpose of the research, and asked for basic demographic information. Twenty-four nominees (10 men, 14 women) returned the information form and indicated a willingness to participate in the study if selected.

Procedure

Purposeful sampling for information-rich cases was used for selecting participants from the nominations received. Professionals at the senior, mid-, and entry levels who represented a diverse sample in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and field of specialization were sought. An ongoing commitment to the diversity of the sample guided sampling decisions.

The 11 participants selected included five men, six women, 10 Caucasians, and one African American. They included three experienced mid-level student affairs practitioners, six senior student affairs officers, and two graduate faculty members in student affairs preparation programs. Although an effort was made to include entry-level practitioners among the participants, none of the nominees who returned information forms indicated this status. The participants represent 11 four-year institutions from various parts of the United States, six public and five private. Seven of these are institutions with student populations of more than 10,000 students. All of the participants are married/partnered and 10 of the 11 have children. Very few of our nominees were single; none of the nominees who returned information forms indicated single status although we pursued efforts to recruit participants from this population. All nominees who responded were Caucasian, with the exception of one African-American female. The participants' experience in student affairs ranged from 14 to 35 years; eight participants had more than 20 years of experience. Ages ranged from 40 to 58, and over half were between the ages of 48 to 51. The limited range in age and experience was consistent with levels of practitioners and faculty members nominated.

The interviewer obtained consent through a written informed consent form which each participant signed and received a copy. To guard confidentiality, the researchers' copies of participants' consent forms were retained separately from the data. Each participant chose or was assigned a pseudonym to further protect participants' confidentiality, and all data were labeled with the pseudonym only. Data remained in the researchers' possession; research team members performed all transcribing.

Interviews

In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted that were aimed at engaging the participants in dialogue about their understandings of balance and their experiences with attempting and achieving personal/professional balance. A series of two interviews was conducted with each participant. Interviews ranged from 30 to 75 minutes. First round interviews were semi-structured and followed an established interview protocol that provided an opportunity for participants to tell their stories and describe their conceptions of balance. The interview protocol was adapted, in part, from Kofodimos' (1993)

developmental change process for integrating balance into one's life. The protocol focused on the participant's reaction to being nominated, concept of balance, approach to personal/professional balance, and issues of balance in the student affairs profession. Although the interview protocol was structured, interviewers had latitude to explore responses in more depth or add questions to follow a line of thought that the participant introduced. With the exception of one, these interviews were all conducted in person at national conferences or on the participant's campus. The remaining interview had been scheduled to occur at a national conference, but the participant's travel schedule changed and precluded the completion of the interview there. This interview was completed by telephone. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

The second set of interviews was conducted by telephone approximately two months following the first round. The follow-up interview allowed the participants an opportunity to review the transcript from their first round interview, posed questions to clarify any points that needed additional elaboration, and followed up on themes generated through the first round of interviews and from the preliminary conceptions of balance culled from the nomination statements. As before, interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

Data Analysis

The grounded theory approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967) was used to guide data analysis. A systematic, inductive strategy was utilized for the discovery of concepts and categories from which an emerging theory describing the phenomenon was generated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Constant comparative method analysis occurred across cases after the first round of interviews. Data were coded or collapsed into smaller pieces of data in order to be categorized, considered, and reconceptualized. Three levels of coding, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), were utilized to ground the emerging theory in concepts that surface from the data. Analysis focused on the development of emergent themes and occurred in three stages. Open coding targeted micro-analysis of the interview transcripts, often in a word-by-word fashion. Open coding occurred over two sessions and developed categories as a way of discovering the major themes. Reflection on these categories generated themes that could be treated as axes for the second stage of axial coding. During axial coding, each theme was used as an analytic focus in moving through the interview transcripts. Analysis generated dimensions and subdimensions of each axis and occurred over three sessions. At the end of axial coding, the dimensions and subdimensions were reviewed, organized, and collapsed to provide a description of each major theme. Selective coding led to the generation of the theory. The findings below are described utilizing

themes that emerge from the words, experiences, and reflections of the participants.

Trustworthiness of these findings was enhanced through member checking, a process in which participants verify data and the resulting interpretations. In this study, participants were given an opportunity to review the interview transcripts and respond to follow up questions. All 11 participants participated in member checks. Confirmability was demonstrated through maintaining copies of all interview tapes, pre-interview reflections from each member of the research team, notes from interviewer reflections and discussions, and hard copies of transcripts. Finally, "thick description" and solid descriptive data were provided in order for the reader to determine transferability of findings, the extent to which the study's findings can be transferred to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

A model of balance emerged from the data that is developmental and contains two major components, strategies for balance and keys to balance. Although there were many strategies used by our participants to attain balance, there were four underlying primary keys to balance: (a) self-knowledge, (b) intentionality, (c) commitment to self care, and (d) reflection. The model and its key components are discussed below, following some explication of how participants conceptualized balance.

Conceptions of Balance

From the outside. The nomination process provided an initial perspective on what balance "looks like" in our profession. The nomination statements in which professionals explained who they were nominating and why contained several unsolicited and almost apologetic admissions that the nominators certainly did not consider themselves to be models of balance; others commented that the person they nominated probably did not think of him or herself as balanced. In fact, one nominator predicted that his nominee might "fall on the floor laughing when she hears someone associates 'balance' with her."

Six key themes were identified from the nomination statements received. These themes paint a description of balance from the outside – of how student affairs professionals see balance when they look at others. First, the most commonly mentioned criterion for nomination was the ability to balance family and work. This theme is striking in that it conveys a notion of balance that by definition does not encompass those without children or spouses/partners. The nominees' lifestyles were often captured with descriptions like, "she is a non-stop energizer bunny who seeks to get the most of her professional and personal life," or "does a good job of attending to family, physical health and

maintaining a sense of humor." A second theme was that nominees were "deliberate and intentional in balancing work, play, and family/friends."

Third, a propensity to take an active role in multiple aspects of life was repeatedly mentioned, for example, "active in PTA, church, and university-community activities." Other nominators chose to focus on what they saw their nominee do to achieve balance, such as "makes time for needed personal reflection and nourishment periodically." Pointing out qualities such as "high integrity and sensitivity towards others" was a fifth way nominators explained why they selected their nominee. Finally, some chose their nominees because they had observed them role modeling balance or explicitly promoting the importance of balance through graduate school classes or conference presentations.

From the inside. Nearly all of the participants in the study had a personal metaphor for their conception of balance. However, the traditional "scale" model was not one that was utilized by any of the participants. As Andy joked, "When I hear people talk, I hear them talk about scales and keeping the scales balanced. Well, if my life was just two-faceted where I could just keep two scales in balance—that would be easy." Juggling was the most common metaphor. "You are always juggling a number of things," said Patrick. Andy noted that while he used to try not to let any of the balls he was juggling fall and bounce, he has learned that sometimes he must "let them bounce and hopefully they don't break." Ben also juggles balls, some of which "are glass and some of them are rubber. And I always want to keep the ones that are glass in the air. The ones that are rubber—I'm okay with letting them bounce once in a while because I know they're going to bounce and I have a chance to pick them up."

Grace's closely related metaphor was one of "the juggler in the circus who has the poles with the plates spinning on the tops of the poles." She vividly spoke of the "different patterns" people have "in how many plates they can keep spinning." Her metaphor also took into account different demands in the various phases of life or varying workloads. She noted, "At times in our lives, like when you have a major trauma, like a death, then you've got to take some of those plates down." She concluded that is essential for each person to know "when to take down plates or when you can put up more plates" as well as "which ones are central and important and always need attending to." Her plates are "conceptual and differ in sizes and categories" such as family, work (her professional activities), job (her position-related responsibilities), and personal. There are some that just "can't wobble."

Libby asserted that balance is "like fine art . . . you know it when you see it," and in her case, when she felt it. Louise saw balance through the metaphor of

an ocean with an ebb and flow of energy, a rhythm. Andy also suggested the metaphor of the child's toy "Weebles." These toys have a rounded base and the slogan "Weebles wobble but they don't fall down." He explained,

> If you remember that toy, it has a rounded base. And you can push it and it will twist and do all these things, but it will always come back. What to me is "coming back" and what guides my life is my values and the calling that I have for the profession.

As Patrick pointed out, "In many senses, the metaphors that one uses to describe balance are as important at the description itself," particularly because of the "challenge in trying to understand a concept as nuanced as balance." Through the many metaphors suggested by our participants, perhaps the most comprehensive is Patrick's suggestion that balance is like a gem in that "the only way you would really understand it is to look at its many facets. You have to turn and look and examine it. You need to sample all these other characteristics before you really understand it."

Participants also offered their own definitions of balance. Louise defined balance as "living life to its fullest potential" including elements of both breadth and depth of experience. Jill's view was that balance is the "relative proportion of your whole occupied by work" combined with "finding other sources of meaning and enjoyment outside of work." Libby focused on the concept of "living out my priorities" as she felt balanced "when the people and points of responsibility that I have are healthy." Jacque summed up balance as a "healthy pace or pattern," and Frank saw it as "being true to self and those around me" in the process of balancing "responsibility to work with responsibilities outside of work, including responsibility to faith." Ben defined balance as a process or journey versus a destination.

An important point underscored by Grace as she defined balance was that "balance is an issue for everyone in their own context, not just those with families and children." Jill illustrated this when she explained, "My conception of balance actually precedes kids." In the lives of our participants, a conception of balance that is frequently found in the literature, that of work and family, was too narrow because it excluded those who were not married or partnered and potentially those without children. Jill acknowledges that though "the first blush, recognizable balance is family life and professional life, there are other sides of the equation." In fact, "single people have more to balance because they are the only person doing all of it," explained Grace. These participants described a concept of balance that included all the facets of one's life, including community, faith, volunteer activities, professional service, and more but was not dependent on marital status or having children.

Balance develops. It became clear through our interviews that these participants experienced balance not as a static concept, but as a developmental process with a changing meaning over different phases in life and the profession. Libby captured this most clearly when she said that her concept of balance had "changed for me over time. It's manifested itself in different ways developmentally through the years." Frank noted that he had only "figured it out later in life" and Megan similarly noted that balance came "as I have had more wisdom." Louise noted that she "hasn't always been that way" and that she expects her concept of balance to "continue to grow and change." There are, according to Libby, "critical incidents along the way" that help you to "crystallize" your developing concept and abilities to balance. She also adds that you can "learn vicarious lessons from others around you."

As we listened to the participants, we became convinced of balance as a developmental concept particularly as it relates to self-knowledge, a primary key to balance that will be discussed more fully below. As Grace noted, "It starts with knowing yourself;" and this "primary step" is harder when you are younger. Jill also noted, "Balance changes during life phases." Although her concept of balance "precedes kids," she notes a definite change once she became a parent that was echoed by Ben and Alfred. Frank noted that he is "still struggling, still working on balance" and Ben expected balance to be a "life long conversation—a life long process of figuring it out."

Model of Balance

As described by our participants, balance appears to be a developmental journey. This journey incorporates various strategies used by the participants and is built on a foundation of four keys to balance. In the next section, strategies are presented, followed by the four key components of balance of (a) self-knowledge, (b) intentionality, (c) commitment to self-care, and (d) reflection.

Strategies—Things You Do to Form and Find Balance

Participants mentioned a variety of strategies they utilized to achieve a sense of balance. Patrick described these vividly as "things you do to form and find balance." He noted that these will "vary by the person." Most commonly mentioned was the approach of planning and prioritizing. Megan described herself as a "big planner," and Grace noted her strategy of "creating structures that let you have balance." Libby explained that the "points of my week get anchored to things I feel are not negotiable." Planning and prioritizing includes embracing the idea that "you can not do it all and do it all well," according to Andy. There have to be sacrifices, reported Andy. Jill described a "constant sort" that she conducts where some things "fall to the bottom of the list."

Other common strategies were delegation, multitasking, judicious use of time, and setting boundaries. Several participants emphasized the critical nature of learning to say no. Jill uses the self disciplinary strategy of holding herself to saying "no" twice for every time she says "yes" to a request or additional responsibility. Learning to say no also includes convincing yourself that "it's okay to say no," according to Jacque. Ben also stressed this aspect of developing a comfort level with saying no.

Participants commonly mentioned strategies related to taking care of the self. Working out, avoiding burnout, and listening to oneself were suggested as vital strategies for maintaining the energy and positive attitude needed for work in the student affairs profession. Grace "looks for renewing things like lunch with friends." Alfred noted that you "can't skimp on yourself and your physical health." Closely related strategies included the intentional use of humor and laughter to, in Andy's words, "make it fun." Perhaps Jacque hit closest to the stark truth when she commented, "You can either laugh or it will kill you," recognizing the inherent stress and emotional press of work in student affairs.

The majority of the participants advocated a philosophy of integration as a strategy for balance. They spoke of combining and integrating family and work activities by involving family members in campus activities and taking kids to sporting events and other events on campus. "There are ways that you can incorporate your family into the life of an institution," explained Jill. Louise warned against "compartmentalizing," and Grace echoed her sentiment, saying she "couldn't segment it out" because her "whole life is congruent with all the parts blended."

Flexibility was a strategy that received a great deal of support. Louise advocated flexibility and adaptability, even to the point of "letting go of things like to-do lists," a basic staple of time management. Frank concurred, saying, "You can't be too rigid or structured with your time." Grace also mentioned the necessity of being able to "switch gears." For Patrick, it was being "prepared to remake ourselves in times of rapid change."

Many of the participants mentioned the strategy of working with a spouse or partner to attain a sense of balance. Some noted sharing caregiving responsibilities for children and home responsibilities. On a related theme, Jacque specifically advocated using mentors for advice and as guideposts in the journey toward balance.

Finally, having a specific philosophy to guide your efforts toward balance was essential to Alfred. He found Adlerian philosophy helpful as a platform or lens through which to direct his efforts to achieve balance. Other participants mentioned a spiritual or faith-based center. "To be a person of faith that seeks

to effect change to make the world a more caring place, a more just place" was the overarching goal with which Patrick sought congruency.

Four Keys to Balance

Many of the articles reviewed for the literature review portion of this study focused on identifying strategies for busy professionals to attain balance. However, we found by talking with these participants that building competency in the strategic areas identified above was not the core of the issue of balance. These interviews brought to light four "keys to balance" that form a foundation for attaining and maintaining a sense of personal and professional balance. It is in these four areas that growth and development of a professional's sense of balance also occurs.

Self-knowledge. Grace put it most eloquently when she said, "The key to balance is to know what is important to you and to have a sense of self." She continued, "Knowing what you want helps you to say no to the things that you don't." Other participants also explicitly noted the importance of knowing yourself and having a good sense of your values and priorities. Without this self-knowledge, which Louise describes as being "grounded in oneself," the struggle to attain balance is on shifting ground rather than a firm foundation.

Libby offered a definition of balance that underscores the importance of this key when she said that balance is "spending my time in ways congruent with my values." This self-knowledge requires having tackled the developmental tasks of clarifying, humanizing, and personalizing your values and forming a sense of your identity. Alfred elaborated, "As a person, you have to have some sense of who you are and where you are going so that you can make choices that are consistent with that view of yourself."

Intentionality. "Ultimately," Patrick asserted, "balance is about making choices." It is about having a "deeper down strategy" according to Andy. Balance does not just happen; it is the product of intentional choices. Alfred explained, "At some point in time, you've got to make some decisions about how you are going to do things and how you are going to spend your time." Jill spoke of a life she has "crafted" by making decisions about "appropriate allocations" of her resources to support the "things that are most important." Louise offered the notion of "optimizing tensions." Some forces in life may seem to be in opposition to each other, or to attaining a sense of balance. "When you have two tensions, you try to find that third way, that dimension that then brings them together to a new and different level."

Alfred summed it up, "The only way to avoid imbalance is to choose to deliberately be balanced, to think about what you are doing, to think about what's coming up, to make choices to try to maintain balance." He cautioned,

"If you are not careful, if you just put your mind into neutral and let it drag you along where it will go, you'll go in all the wrong places."

Commitment to self-care. "If I'm going to be every day listening to everyone else's stories, I have to be able to listen to my own story," asserted Megan in a clear statement of her commitment to caring for herself. She notes that she makes sure she has balance "in terms of exercise, eating right, and sleeping enough."

Libby also captured this concept vividly,

> You can't do a very good job at your work if you are not taking care of yourself. And you can not expect your elders to do that for you. You can not expect your boss to say, "You look like you need a nap, why don't you go home today?" You know, you have to learn to find your own voice, you have to learn the skills of self advocacy and to do that in a way that is respectful of what the institution needs, but at the same time, you have to tend to yourself.

This commitment to self-care goes deeper than the related strategies mentioned in the previous section. It is a dedication to the "fundamental premise," in Libby's words, that "you owe yourself first." She explained that we must "tend to ourselves first in order to have the emotional and spiritual and physical energy to bring something good and healthy" to our work and our relationships. "When I call my own timeouts to nurture myself, then I've got so much more to give back.... I can't do the work I'm capable of doing without taking care of myself to do it."

Perhaps this concept is best expressed by Megan. She stated, "If you don't take care of yourself, no one else is going to."

Reflection. Reflection is a key component in balance. Ben spoke of "daily or weekly conversations with myself" as being key to attaining and maintaining a sense of balance. Patrick strove to be an intentional, reflective practitioner by trying "to allow some time each day for reflection," but he also admitted that sometimes there is "too much 'noise,'" making it challenging to reflect.

Although some mentioned quiet time on a commute home from work, keeping a journal, or making a mental review of the day, Grace pointed out that reflection is "important for everyone, but we all do it differently." As an extravert, she rarely ever journals but she talks out loud to process her experiences. She stated that "reflection doesn't have to be passive."

Discussion

Our participants were honored to be considered balanced and to have been nominated by their peers for inclusion in this study. However, they expressed a

great hesitancy to present themselves as balanced and frequently joked about it. Andy admitted to feeling like "a charlatan" and Grace feeling like "an imposter." Patrick explained that he felt it would be arrogant of him to claim to be balanced. It is important to remember that others only get a "surface view," said Andy. Grace expressed her view that you are "never as balanced as other people see you." Alfred noted that

> you see your professional colleagues so rarely, typically just at conferences and state meetings and regional meetings and that sort of thing, and it is hard to get a notion about who is balanced and who isn't, who talks a good game and who really walks the talk.

It is clear that balance is a desired ideal, and these professionals considered it to be a compliment that others thought of them in this light.

In many interviews, student affairs professionals' responsibility to model balance was stressed. Louise acknowledged that in the learning environment "we are role modeling, whether we are doing it intentionally, and when we don't even know we are being role models.... We are very visible for sometimes thousands of students and hundreds of staff members." This modeling can be particularly difficult when, as Megan expressed, "the role models that I had were more negative than positive."

Louise emphasized our "responsibility to be role models to students and knowing that these students are looking for balance from us. They are not looking for workaholic role models, they're not looking for success-at-all-expense role models." However, Libby pointed out an important disconnect:

> I think this is a profession that professes an ethic of care. I think in reality there are a lot of people that model very unhealthy work habits and there are unhealthy work cultures that people get into where there is an expectation that you work 80 hours a week.

She went on to say, "Our undergraduate students need to see that there are role models for good health, and that their elders, even if they are 25-year-old hall directors, are making good decisions and making good choices."

Megan aimed "to be a really positive role model with my staff." She wants younger professionals to "see that the quality of work and the way we can be role models for students" are most important, "not the quantity" of what we do. Grace noted that negotiating boundaries is a "skill that younger professionals need to learn," likely, as Jill explained, "by constantly experimenting, trial and error." Libby identified

> an issue of balance, especially for new professionals, is balancing what we believe our students need from us with what we need to give ourselves.

> Just finding a way to take that time for yourself and not feel guilty about it and not have to justify it is, I think, particularly difficult for new professionals.

Thus, quality supervision is key for young professionals in developing their ability to balance. Grace explained, "I think that supervision is essential." Ben concurred, "It's really incumbent upon me or whoever is supervising new professionals to help them understand what the expectations are and what the priorities are." He also noted that the "supervisory conversation" should include questions such as "How are you spending your time?" and suggestions about how they might structure their time and how what they are doing "fits into the larger picture." An intentional supervisor can assist in helping new professionals understand the concept of balance and professional expectations.

Louise observed the changing nature of professionals entering the field of student affairs. She stated,

> The folks that are teaching us more about balance are the new professionals that are coming into the field because they have a great sense of creating time for themselves and their families as priorities as much as their student affairs work.

She further suggested that

> this is one of those times when we turn the tables and we really need to learn about balance much more so from our newer professionals coming into the field…. Although I am not sure to what degree it exists, if there is a sense that in order to be an effective student affairs administrator you really have to live out of balance to be effective in this field, then that is certainly not what is going to attract and retain young professionals who are part of the Millennial generation to this field.

There are several areas that hold promise for future research in the area of personal and professional balance. A study focused on single professionals in the field or on professionals of color would add a great deal to this body of research. In addition, a longitudinal study that began with participants who are new to the profession may be of interest. This and future qualitative work could yield information to form a quantitative assessment instrument.

Conclusion and Implications for Student Affairs Practice

Balance is nuanced and extremely individualistic. Strategies vary from person to person, and the foundation formed by the keys is unique to each individual. It is also elusive in that there is no set solution that will work for all or even for an individual throughout his or her life. Balance is a constantly changing relationship that you have with yourself and others. It shifts and evolves. The bottom line is that it as about making meaning in your life and living

consistently with this meaning. As Andy stated, "There is not a universal right—we must each decide what's right for us." Libby spoke out against judging others in their attempts to gain balance: "It's okay if we don't have the same priorities as long as we are honoring people's needs to act on the priorities that they have. So we don't have to share them, we just have to honor them."

There are internal and external factors that affect one's ability to balance. They may serve as challenges or supports. Among these are (a) fit (or lack thereof) with the position and the institution, (b) supervisor's style and expectations, (c) amount of control one has in one's position, (d) culture of the student affairs division and institution, (e) meaning and satisfaction derived from one's work, (f) supportiveness of spouse or partner, and (g) individual's drive and level of optimism.

Student affairs work holds particular challenges for attaining balance, most particularly the "24/7" nature of the work, the involvement in the "informal life of the college," and the demands of a helping profession. However, the collegiate environment also has the advantages of a great deal of flexibility and a multitude of rewards. As Jill stated, "We are lucky in higher education that you get opportunities to balance a bit better than other people do because you are in a platform to start with that has more flexibility in its structure than many other industries."

As a profession, student affairs practitioners have the responsibility to role model for our students and staff a balanced and healthy approach to our personal and professional lives. This responsibility means student affairs professionals must be intentional about efforts toward balance. The topic must be included in professional dialogues, at the individual level with supervisors and supervisees, at the department and divisional level, and at the professional association level. We should also foster opportunities for reflection and for gaining self-knowledge, as these will also support the meaning-making necessary to attain greater balance. The obligation for student affairs professionals to commit to self care in order to be maximally effective in their responsibilities to others should be underscored in multiple ways from graduate education throughout the professional career.

As Alfred concluded, "If you're not having a good time with what you're doing, you ought to be wondering about what is going on." The model of balance that emerged in this study emphasized looking carefully at who you are and the values you hold, reconfirming your commitment to self care, making intentional choices and decisions, and engaging in regular reflection as the keys to working toward a better sense of balance. Each individual must build competencies with the specific balance strategies that work for you.

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