

Chapter 31

Creating and Maintaining Balance: Work–Life Balance, Self– Care, and Mindfulness

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will discuss how to ensure that online educators are caring for themselves in order to avoid stress, burnout, and leaving the professions. Because many educators feel additional stressors when working online or from home, the following topics will be discussed to mitigate these stressors: life-work balance, self-care, and mindfulness. Each section will detail the research behind each strategy and will specific ways educators can implement these strategies with ease. The authors share key strategies to work-life balance, self-care, and mindfulness, as well as ways in which the reader can easily teach his or her own students these same skills to increase the likelihood that the future workforce is prepared for the stressors that will inevitably be a part of their lives.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, instructors and students are spending more time online than ever. For some, online learning and teaching is a welcomed change that helps to create more balance in one's life, while for others, it might be their only option. Either way, there has been an increase in online learning. By 2026, the online learning industry is projected to pass 370 billion dollars (Miller, 2021). Whether an individual is

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a fan of online learning or not, the fact remains that online learning does not seem to be going anywhere. As the pandemic has undoubtedly shown millions across the world, online learning is here to stay. This online presence sometimes feels like work never ends, and therefore can cause stress, burnout, and a feeling like the online instructor is always connected to one's job. Balance is critical. Online educators, and truly all educators in general, need to strike a careful balance between work and life, which seems even more difficult in today's digital world. This chapter will discuss ways online educators can balance the challenges of their work, family, and personal lives. This emphasis will also aid educators in helping their own students to find that same balance in the future, when they become employees. The following topics will be discussed: strategies to implement an appropriate work/life balance for self and for students, self-care, and mindfulness. At the beginning of each section, one will see a discussion of what each skill entails. The middle part of each section will then examine why the skill is important and the research behind it. The section will then conclude by dispensing some hands-on suggestions for making that skill or strategy work in one's life. Additionally, there will be ideas of how to teach these skills to one's students. The key to each topic in the chapter is to practice and make the skill a part of one's repertoire.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

There are numerous benefits for finding a work, family, and personal life balance, and neglecting to focus on finding this balance can lead to many consequences in one's physical and mental health. When it comes to physical health, working online can cause an individual to become very sedentary, and if he or she does not make intentional efforts to get up and move around, this can wreak havoc on one's body. Being sedentary can lead to possible health issues, such as heart disease and high blood pressure (SpriggHR, 2020). Intentional, planned breaks and physical activity will not only provide health benefits; these breaks will also help one become a better employee and more productive in one's career.

In the traditional workplace setting, employees could be found eating their lunches at their desks, while continuing to work. While this might be the reality for occasional deadlines that need to be met, this is not a practice that should become routine, whether in the office or working from a more non-traditional setting, such as a home office. There might be the temptation to take one's lunch break or snack breaks whenever it seems convenient, but it is better practice to be intentional, scheduling snacks, movement breaks, and lunch breaks before beginning the workday. Scheduling these breaks helps twofold: it can also help with excessive snacking that could take place being in one's own home and can create a more rigorous and productive work routine. Unlike at the office, where a person only has the food that he or she brought with him or her to work, in one's own home, the possibilities for snacking can seem endless. This endless all-you-can-eat buffet can cause unintentional weight gain, especially when combined with a decrease in movement. To help avoid those extra pounds, creating a schedule of breaks and even planning for snacks and lunch can be extremely beneficial. Just like one would prep these items when going to an office, it is possible to do the same for one's home office. Sticking to a schedule and only eating what has been prepared for the day will help avoid opening the snack cupboard! It is important to make sure that one's schedule includes breaks for physical movement as well, which seems difficult to do once one gets to work, but it can be done!

It is very easy to just sit down at the desk and lose oneself in the work for the day. Before one realizes, hours have passed, and the Fitbit has given up on the reminders to get up and take some extra steps. This continuous lack of movement could begin to cause some physical consequences, as well as mental

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