

by
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Credits

The ebook cover and banners were designed by Charlie from [Charfish Design](#).

Several wonderful people from the [Third Tribe site](#) gave their time and energy in providing feedback on the first draft of this ebook. Their contributions have undoubtedly made it a better read. They are:

- Shawn Christenson – [ShawnChristenson.com](#)
- Paul Cunningham – [BloggingTeacher.com](#)
- Mike Davenport – [MaxRigging.com](#)
- Dustin Riechmann – [EngagedMarriage.com](#)
- Shayna Walker – [Williamsburg Wedding Design](#)

Dustin of [Engaged Marriage](#) also generously wrote the piece on parenting and balance which appears in Chapter 1.

And Mike of [MaxRigging](#) provided all the cute sketches throughout the book. Hope you enjoy them as much as I did! 😊

Bonus: Your Questions Answered

If any questions crop up for you as you read the ebook, please drop me a line at ali@aliventures.com before Tuesday July 6th 2010. I'll address them all and send a bonus "Regain Your Balance Q&A" PDF with my responses to all the buyers of *Regain Your Balance*. (Don't worry; if you ask a question, you'll remain totally anonymous.)

Just email your question(s) to ali@aliventures.com with "Regain Your Balance Question" in the subject line.

Please note – I won't be answering questions individually, so you won't get a response until the Q&A PDF is published.

Introduction

I'm guessing you picked up this ebook because you feel that you're wobbling a bit (or a lot). So what does getting your balance back mean?

For a start, balance isn't a state which you suddenly achieve and effortlessly maintain.

Think about riding a bike – or even learning to walk. Sure, it feels easy once you've learnt to do it, because you're used to balancing. But you're actually making constant adjustments against external forces. If you're on a bike, you might lean a little to the left, then a little to the right. On a blustery day, the direction and force of the wind gets factored in.

When you're walking, you're constantly falling one way then the other, each foot coming down to touch the ground and change your direction.

No-one can *make* you balance. You can lean on people, sure. You can use props, like stabilisers on a bike. But ultimately, you have to balance on your own.

What About Work/Life Balance?

I don't like the phrase "work/life balance". It draws a dichotomy where there isn't one. Your work is *part* of your life – and we run into problems when we start thinking about work as some necessary evil which we endure in order to get on with the rest of life.

If you're miserable at work, it's going to poison the rest of your life.

Although you might well adopt a more "professional" attitude at work than in your leisure time, you're *still the same person*. You may adapt your behaviour a little in order to play a particular role (just like you'd behave a bit different with your young nieces and nephews than with your old friends from college) – but you are still *you*.

If you love your work, the borders between "work" and "life" will be fluid. (Which brings up its own set of problems – more on that in [Chapter 5: Real Recharging](#) – but which can also bring a huge amount of joy.)

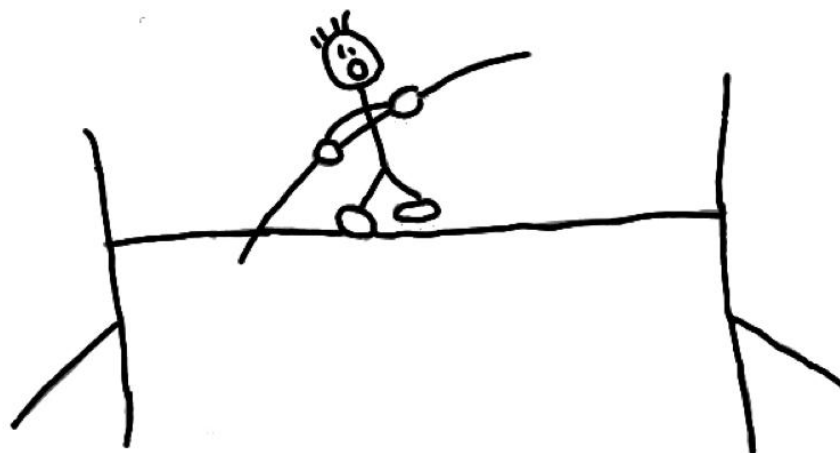
Instead of looking for some way to have *more* life and *less* work, look for ways in which your work can become a more natural part of your life.

How to Regain Your Balance

It's okay to feel off-balance. It's not something to feel guilty or panicked about. It's a state that a lot of us – probably all of us – get into at some time. I know I do.

In the rest of this ebook, I'll be helping you to figure out where exactly in *your* life you can find balance. I'll give you practical tips and things to do. I'll try my best to keep you positive and motivated.

When you're off-balance, it's so easy to get overwhelmed and scared and stuck. You might feel like you're on the verge of falling. You might think that balance is perfectly possible for other people, but not for you.



I'm here as a helping hand. I'm here to say that it *is* possible, and that you *can* do it, and that, above all, you deserve to make your own health, happiness and fulfilment a priority.

Throughout the ebook, I've put questions to get you thinking.

The questions are in boxes like this. They're also included on the worksheets to help you take action.

I'd really encourage you to print out the accompanying worksheets and jot down your thoughts.

This isn't something to rush through. You don't learn to balance in a day.

Each chapter can be read in isolation; I've ordered them in a way which works for me, but you might prefer to read them in a different sequence.

- **Taming Time:** Changing how you think about time – and making good use of it
- **Cultivating Creativity:** The importance of creativity – and how it both recharges and drains us
- **Finding Focus:** setting your priorities – and protecting them
- **Energising Environments:** How your physical surroundings can help (or hinder) balance
- **Real Recharging:** The importance of active and passive relaxation
- **Managing Money:** Feeling good, rather than guilty or anxious, about money

Not sure where to begin? I've included a questionnaire on the next page to help you pin-point the areas which you want to concentrate on first.

Start Here...

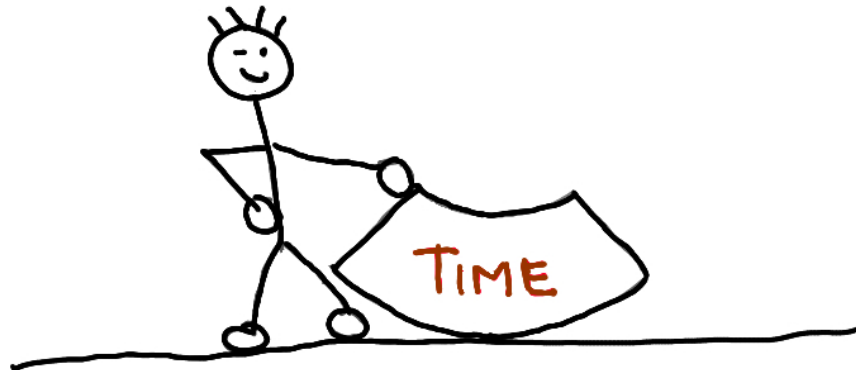
Put a mark by any statements which apply to you. (If it's all of them, don't worry, you're in good company... I've struggled with all these problems during recent years.) Look for any common patterns in the "Read These" column, picking the topic which comes up the most. Then flick to that chapter, and get going.

✓	Sounds Familiar?	Read These	
	I never get to the end of my to-do list.	TIME	FOCUS
	I love drawing (or writing/music/etc) but I never find time for it now	TIME	CREATIVITY
	Whenever I sit down at my desk, I feel overwhelmed.	FOCUS	ENVIRONMENT
	I'm always tired and/or stressed.	RECHARGING	TIME
	I set lots of goals but struggle to meet them.	FOCUS	
	I can never understand where my paycheck goes.	MONEY	
	I'd like to be more creative, but I can't afford it.	MONEY	CREATIVITY
	I find it hard to relax and unwind in the evenings.	RECHARGING	ENVIRONMENT
	It's a constant battle to keep my house/desk/room tidy.	ENVIRONMENT	
	I have loads of ideas but I never seem to finish anything.	CREATIVITY	FOCUS
	I find it really hard to say "no" – to myself and to others.	TIME	FOCUS
	I love my work, but I'm starting to feel exhausted.	RECHARGING	
	I'd like to hire a cleaner, but I can't afford it.	TIME	MONEY
	I don't understand people who get passionate about their work. It's <i>work</i> !	CREATIVITY	
	I can never sit down and concentrate on my writing (drawing/music/etc)	CREATIVITY	ENVIRONMENT
	I get bored very quickly when I've got some free time.	RECHARGING	

Chapter 1: Taming Time

Time – and our relationship to time – is a huge part of balance.

Our time is a finite resource. Unlike money, and despite what advertisers would have you think, you can't make *extra* time.



Time is never empty, either. We talk a lot about "saving" and "wasting" and "spending" time, when in fact time will always pass at one hour per hour, whatever we're doing.

In many ways, time is an equaliser: however rich or poor you are, you have twenty four hours in a day.

Rather than seeing time as a cruel limitation, look at it as a gift. You have more options than you can possibly count, multiple choices for every minute of every day. You can choose to specialise in whatever career or course of study that you want. The limitation of time means that none of us will ever read all of the books in the world, or achieve all the possible goals. Instead, we can select and pursue the paths that appeal to us most.

Never Enough Time?

One of the big struggles which we have with time is the sense that there's not *enough* of it. We feel as though all we need to achieve balance is a bit of extra time. A couple more hours in the day, and we'd get everything done and have time to relax too.

The problem doesn't lie with time, though. It lies with us.

I expect that at some point in your life, you've come out of a particular busy spell – exams at university, a hectic job, a manic Christmas – and felt certain that you were going to have *plenty* of time to get everything done, and to have a more balanced life. What happened? Did you end up with the space to relax and recharge, or did you find new commitments piling into your life?

If you're constantly busy, recognise that you will *never* have enough time to do everything that you'd like to do. In many ways, this is a blessing. You can safely set aside activities which aren't especially fulfilling or challenging, and you can focus on the few goals which *really* matter to you.

More time will not solve your problems. If anything, when a large time-sink leaves your life (children grow up; you retire from your job), you may find that your real problems are magnified. Perhaps you've got a chronic inability to say "no", or you're great at starting things but not at finishing them, or you procrastinate endlessly. You might be living your life according to someone else's definition of success; you might even be chasing several different and incompatible ideas of "perfection".

The other parts of this ebook should help tackle some of these issues. For the rest of this chapter, I'll concentrate on some ways to make the most of the time that you've been given: to use it well, and to enjoy it more.

Some Hours are Better than Others

All chunks of time are not equal! I can get more done from 0800-1000 on most days than I can from 1600-2000, even though the latter block has twice as much time.

(Charlie Gilkey, [How Heatmapping Your Productivity Can Make You More Productive](#), Productive Flourishing)

One of the best things about being a freelancer is the amount of control I have over my own schedule. I used to get up at an unholy hour to fit in some writing before my day job – because it was much easier for me to be productive at 6am than in the evening after a full day's work. Nowadays, I do my most creative or energy-intense work (usually writing) in the mornings, and save more routine tasks like emails and administration for the afternoons.

I don't know whether you're a morning person or not. Maybe you work really well before breakfast, before the family are awake, before your day has started. Or maybe you warm up slowly and have your peak just before lunch. Perhaps you tend to be at your best in the evenings, buzzing with thoughts and ready to settle down and focus after dinner.

What I *do* know is that you'll have some times of day when you're easily able to concentrate, and other times when all you want to do is slump on the sofa. Of course, these exact times may shift a little from day to day – depending on what time you woke up, when you eat your meals, and so on – but they'll remain relatively constant.

So here's what to do:

Figure out what your peak times are. When is it easy for you to work? When can you concentrate almost effortlessly? (Look for blocks of around 2- 3 hours at a time. You may find that you have one block in the morning and one in the afternoon or evening.)

You'll already have a rough idea. To fine-tune it try keeping a diary for a few days. Jot down what you're doing at different times of the day, and add a note about how easy/hard you were finding it to concentrate and stay enthused.

Sometimes, your natural peaks aren't at a convenient time of day. Maybe, like me, you work well between 7.30am and 10.30am – but you spend half that time getting the kids ready and packed off to school. Or maybe you have evening classes at the worst possible time – your 7pm slump.

Where you can make changes to work in your peak times, do. That might mean shifting your hours at work slightly, or making the kids' lunches the night before (when you feel brain-dead). If you really can't shift to a better time slot, start looking for other peaks. You might want to experiment with a different sleep pattern – perhaps getting up earlier means you can put in some time on your business first-thing in the morning.

Try This: Track your time for three days, noting when you were most/least productive. This needn't be complex – here are a couple of different layouts you can use, with examples:

Time	Activity
8.00	Writing blog post
8.45	Uploading and formatting post
8.55	Break

Or, to give a more graphical view of where your time goes, divide the time column into fifteen minute intervals.

Time slot	Activity
8.00	Writing blog post
8.15	"
8.30	"

Cutting Out Time Sinks

If your life feels like a constant string of appointments and activities, look for ways to make *big* time gains. Trying to work harder and smarter isn't going to help – you'll just end up feeling rushed.

To figure out the big wins, look for *time sinks* in your life – the areas which take up big chunks of time on a daily or weekly basis (say, four or more hours over the week), other than your actual work. Things like:

- Cleaning the house and doing laundry
- Buying groceries and cooking
- Helping with a community group
- Exercising
- Answering emails
- Looking after young children

Now, of course, you may enjoy some of these activities: perhaps you spend a lot of time volunteering, but you love it. Maybe you get a real kick out of running around with your kids. The items on that list to target are the ones which you could happily live without: cleaning and laundry, perhaps!

I was struck by Sid Savara's post [The Price of my Dreams – \\$60 a Week](#) where he explains how outsourcing his meals frees up a huge amount of time (and how he used time logging to realise this):

To find out where my time was leaking, I painstakingly logged everything I did for a month – from the time I woke up, to the time I went to bed, everything went into a large spreadsheet. **I learned that these were of some of my biggest time wasters:**

Cooking

Washing dishes – especially pots, pans and knives that can't go in the dishwasher

Shopping – especially for food!

Driving out to get take out (just DRIVING!)

(Sid Savara, [The Price of my Dreams - \\$60 a Week](#), SidSavara.com)

How about you? What's taking up a big chunk of your time *and* draining your energy?

There might be some items on your list which seem non-negotiable. They take up several hours a week: you don't like doing them, but they just *have* to be done.

I'd challenge you to question whether that's really true. Even if you can't ditch a particular chore altogether, can you pay someone else to do it? Can you get your partner or kids to help out? Can you reorganise the way you do things to make it less of a hassle and less of a time sink?

Any time you find yourself saying *I have to do this*, try to stop and remind yourself that you *chose* to do it, and you're *choosing* to carry on. That doesn't mean you necessarily have to like it – but it does mean that you're back in control.

What *one* time sink could you cut out completely? (What's the first step to doing that?)

And what *one* time sink could you massively reduce by approaching it in a different way?
(What's the first step?)

New Commitments

Maybe you have a hard time saying "no" – not just to other people, but to yourself. You often end up over-committing your time. Sometimes, this is with a sense of dread – *"what have I let myself in for?"* – but it might also be with a sense of excitement – *"ooh, this sounds cool!"*

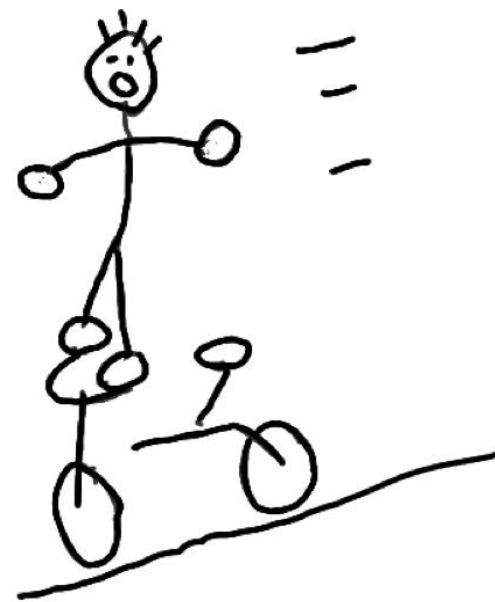
The problem is, however enthused you are about a new project or hobby, you're not going to get any extra hours in the day. In the book *Get Everything Done and Still Have Time to Play*, Mark Forster makes the excellent point that whenever you take on a new commitment, it has to displace something that's already happening.

The thing is, **even if you think you have plenty of "spare" time, you are *already* doing something with that time.** If you're using it to relax and recharge, that matters. Cramming an extra activity in – however interesting or exciting it might be – is going to have a knock-on effect on the rest of your life, and on everything else you're doing.

So, if you're chronically bad at saying "no", how do you avoid taking on too much?

1. Take Some Breathing Space

When you're asked to take on a new commitment, explain that you want a few days to think about it and to decide whether you have the time for it. This means you don't have to worry about saying an over-hasty "no" and regretting it ... but it gives you a chance to think through your decision.



2. Let People Know That You're Busy

It helps to set people's expectations. If you get a lot of requests for help and assistance, try saying something like *"I can give you a hand, but not until Friday – I'm very busy this week."* If you're a freelancer, a full-time parent or a student, people often assume that because you're not "at work" from 9-5 every day, your time is completely free. Disabuse them of this idea as quickly as possible!

3. Give Yourself a Cooling Off Period

Personal finance experts often advise that, to break a habit of impulse shopping, you write down anything non-essential you want to buy – and wait a month before you think again about buying it. Often, your desire for will have gone. You can do something similar if you tend to be impulsive with your time: instead of signing up for that interesting conference right there and then, give yourself at least a week or two to really think about it.

4. Say "No" And Mean It

When you say "no" to a new commitment, stick with it. If you go back on what you've said, people will assume that next time you say "no", you just need a little persuading! And if you tell yourself "no" and promptly ignore it, you're diminishing your ability to follow through with your plans.

Ditching Commitments

There's nothing wrong with quitting. It's far better – for you and (usually) the people around you – if you leave a commitment which you've grown to hate, rather than struggling on with gritted teeth.

It *is* hard to say "I'm sorry, I'm going to have to resign from this", but it's perfectly possible. You do not have to be treasurer of the gardening club for your entire life. There is no need for you to take the minutes at your church meetings for years on end. You don't have to cook dinner for your teenage children every single day, just because you used to.

And when your commitment is really just to yourself, the same applies. If you're struggling to keep up with writing a novel, a memoir *and* a play all at once ... put one aside.

When you give up a current commitment involving other people, it helps to:

- Give some notice. *"I can do the minutes for the next two meetings, but then someone else will need to take over."*
- Be firm. Work out in advance what you'll say if people press you to carry on. You don't need to justify yourself – just say *"I want to focus on other things."*
- Where possible, find someone who's willing to take over. If not, at least offer to show a replacement the ropes. *"I can send you the templates which I use to create the monthly posters."*

Is there anything that you'd love to ditch? (Even if you feel that you've "got to" carry on with it.) You can write it down, even if you don't think you can deal with it yet.

What could you do to start leaving that commitment? (You don't need to quit. Just find a way to start detaching.)

Remember – whenever you're ploughing on with a commitment you don't want, you're taking up a space which could be filled by someone who'd *love* to have a go!

Balancing Life with a Family

By Dustin Riechmann of [Engaged Marriage](#)

Note from Ali: Dustin was one of the early readers for this ebook, and pointed out that I didn't really address the needs of parents with young children. Since I'm not a parent myself, I'm very hesitant to offer any child-care advice; I asked Dustin if he'd be kind enough to contribute a piece to help redress the balance of the ebook itself. 😊

If you have a family to attend to, especially with small children, you face some special challenges. However, this doesn't mean you can't regain your balance. Actually, it means you have added incentive to attend to your own needs so that you are better able to love and care for those who depend on you.

Here are some tips that I've found helpful in finding a healthy balance in my own roles as husband, father to three, full-time professional, community and church volunteer, and part-time writer and educator on the topic of having a happy marriage even if you are super busy:

Set Priorities & Use Your Time Accordingly

Set your priorities, communicate them clearly and then let your actions confirm your good intentions. For me, this means my wife comes before my children, and my family comes ahead of work. And I set aside time for my own fitness and mental well-being, which enables me to be my best for them.

Create Healthy Boundaries

The best way to stay true to your priorities is to create some boundaries with your time. For example, I have a "no computer time" rule where I don't use the laptop (or my smart phone) between the time I get home from work and when we get the kids to bed. By setting up this boundary, I free my time and my mind to enjoy my family.

Set Aside Time to Talk to Your Spouse

Setting aside a little time to just talk to each other has been a tremendous benefit to our relationship (which also makes us better parents). Honestly, if you simply commit to spending 15 minutes per day "being a couple," it can have a meaningful impact on your life together. Check out my [free Marriage Mojo e-course](#) for ideas on how to make the most of your "couple time."

Play!

If you have kids, there is nothing better you can do to please them than simply spending a little time together playing. And few things will help you feel more balanced after a long day at work than laughing with your children!

Be Inspired By Your Family

You love your family, and if you are like me, they motivate you to do great things. Let your time with them fuel your motivation and inspire you to have an awesome life.

Taming Time: Summary

1. There will never be enough time to do everything. Focus on the things which really matter.
2. Figure out where you're using big chunks of time for little gain. Can you ditch or delegate tasks?
3. You're more productive at certain times. Figure out your best hours. Protect them (fiercely).
4. Every new commitment displaces something you're already doing. Obvious, but easy to ignore.
5. Get used to saying "no" and "I quit". It gets easier the more you do it.

Open up the "Worksheets" file: it includes this summary of the chapter, along with all the questions and action points on one handy page.

Oh no! You've reached the end of your free sample...

Get the rest of this ebook from:

<http://www.aliventures.com/regain-your-balance.html>