

## Inside Outreach

### BALANCE

December 2003

Dear Colleagues,

As we bring 2003 to a close and begin planning for the new year, I want to share this simple advice with you from author Stephen Covey, "Anything less than a conscious commitment to the important is an unconscious commitment to the unimportant."

Covey poses three questions in his book, "First Things First," which I think are key for us to consider. He asks:

1. What is the one activity that you know if you did superbly well and consistently would have significant positive results in your personal life?
2. What is the one activity that you know if you did superbly well and consistently would have significant positive results in your professional or work life?
3. If you know these things would make such a significant difference, why are you not doing them now?

A typical response to question #3 might be, "I'm too busy" or "not now, maybe later" or "when things slow down, I'll get to that..." When we are faced with a multitude of tasks, we may begin to make sacrifices that can lead to a dangerous lack of balance in our lives. Over time, this can become destructive to organizations and its people. In this edition of "Inside Outreach" I will focus on the subject of "balance" and why we need it in our lives.

Finding balance in our professional and personal lives presents an enormous challenge for all of us. I confess that I am guilty of regularly tipping the work-life balance scale towards the "work" side. A 1998 national study of extension employees revealed that 65% of the respondents indicated a concern for the ability to create balance between their work, personal, and family lives. A September 2003 report from the U.S. Department of Labor noted that workforce productivity has risen substantially. Critics, however, ask at what cost? Jill Xan Donnelly, president of The Career Exposure Network explains, "While high productivity is a positive economic indicator, it raises concern for the strain it places on employees."

Here at Penn State, we have a very loyal, deeply committed, and extremely talented group of people working to achieve the full Promise of Penn State Outreach in every unit and county office across the state. As I make my rounds here at University Park and throughout the regions, this loyalty and commitment to the outreach mission becomes ever more clear to me. It's inspiring and exciting.

We will need to continue to draw upon your capabilities and expertise to more fully achieve this vision. I will continue to challenge this organization and its members to collectively pursue our vision to be recognized as the premier outreach organization among the nation's institutions of higher education--today, tomorrow, and in the future.

Some argue that we should back off from our land-grant responsibilities-I disagree-You have all heard me say before, this is not the time to back off from our engagement agenda, rather, it is a time to become more aggressive in leading Penn State to greater levels of engagement.

However, because we are called to greater levels of engagement, it is critical that you identify personal ways to strike a balance in your lives. Sister Jean C. Peters, says "I do not suggest that hard work has no place in our lives, but it cannot have the only place. A sense of leisure and a spirit of play need space in us as well."

A national training firm, dedicated to addressing work-life balance issues in organizations, suggests a focus on two key concepts that define the core of work-life balance: achievement and enjoyment. Imagine how rich and fulfilling our daily lives could become if we emphasized achievement and enjoyment.

This firm also highlights three key principles for consideration ([worklifebalance.com](http://worklifebalance.com)):

1. Work-life balance does not mean an equal balance-scheduling an equal balance of hours for work and personal activities may be unrealistic and unrewarding.
2. Optimal work-life balance will vary over time-the right balance today, may be different tomorrow.
3. There is no perfect, one size fits all, balance for which you should be striving-balance is different for all of us because we have different lives and different priorities.

I ask that you reflect on your priorities. Personally. Professionally. I think Covey's call to make a conscious commitment to the important is essential. Defining what is important is the challenge that we face personally and organizationally. We need to be careful not to confuse matters perceived as urgent with matters that are deemed truly important. Don't let the "noise of urgency create the illusion of importance."

At Marriott International, a pilot program was launched to "weed out low value work." According to vice president for diversity and workplace effectiveness, Donna Klein, Marriott's "around-the-clock nature of work and culture of overwork" made the company vulnerable to balance issues. They found that managers were putting in 50-60 hours a week, technology (cell phones and e-mail) contributed to this workload, and "pointless meetings" added another layer of complexity. In response to this epidemic of skewed work demands, Marriott identified and eliminated the "low value" work that was contributing to a tired workforce and wasn't contributing to organizational goals. This resulted in an increase in productivity and enhanced morale among employees. Klein says that by focusing more carefully on high value, important initiatives, and weeding out the low-value work, the program was "wildly successful."

As we begin this reflective season, I encourage you to identify the one activity that you know if you did superbly well and consistently would have significant positive results in your personal life and the one activity that you know if you did superbly well and consistently would have significant positive results in your professional or work life. Then I ask that you commit to these items and act on them.

In the words of the Roman philosopher, Seneca, who lived from 5 B. C. to 65 A. D., "When shall we live if not now? As a tale, so is life; not how long it is, but how good it is, is what matters."

May your semester break be filled with meaningful achievements and abundant enjoyment.

Craig