Balancing the Big Stuff
Finding Happiness in Work, Family, and Life
by Miriam Liss and Holly H. Schiffrin

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A few things you’ll learn from this book:
• How to have fun and be an entrepreneur
• Why you need to rein in involvement
• How stress or happiness at work influences home life
• How to break down barriers to the Good Life

An alternative title to the well-researched and footnoted book Balancing the Big Stuff: Finding Happiness in Work, Family, and Life, could be, “How to Obtain What’s Important and Keep from Losing It.” Written smoothly and descriptively by psychologists Miriam Liss and Holly H. Schiffrin, Balancing the Big Stuff is a road map to the “Good Life.” To have a Good Life, as the two scholars see it, women and men have to strive for balance. A balanced life requires finding the “sweet spot” on the inverted U-shaped curve. The hump of the curve is known as “Just right,” its left tail “Not enough,” and the right, “Too much.” The measure is “Well-being.”

Read Balancing the Big Stuff from a businessperson’s perspective and two phrases are sure to grab attention: “Self-determination theory” and “intrinsically motivated.” “Self-determination theory holds that well-being is maximized when people are motivated intrinsically—in other words when they do things because they actually want to rather than because they feel that they have to or because someone is making them,” write the authors in Chapter 1, “The Search for Balance.”

“Balance at Work” is the title of Chapter 4 and it starts with “Being involved in work is good for people’s well-being. But just because something is good does not mean that more and more of it is better and better.” The advice to all, whether laborers or entrepreneurs, is “lean out,” which means know when to stop working.

The chapter describes the effects of overwork and corporate expectations, neither being good. Then, it posits solutions, which if implemented, might be the difference between a productive workforce and one that’s disgruntled or constantly turning over.

The business owner should consider increased workplace flexibility. That means often-discussed, but seldom implemented flextime and telecommuting options for workers. “Research has consistently shown that initiatives reducing work-family life conflict have positive effects by increasing worker satisfaction which, in turn, increases productivity as well as decreases absenteeism and turnover,” say Liss and Schiffrin.

And, yes, the authors spend plenty of time discussing money-related phenomena such as earning power and financial stability.

Balancing the Big Stuff is part bleak statistics, part analysis of the human condition, and part lists of solutions for our overworked families and society. Entrepreneurs may want to keep in mind at least some of what the book argues if the goal is workforce stability and steady growth.

SUCCESS Magazine Editor Rating:

SUCCESS Points

The fact is that for almost all things in life, there can be too much of a good thing.

About the Authors

Miriam Liss and Holly H. Schiffrin are professors of psychology at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia. They are also wives and mothers. Liss is a licensed clinical psychologist and has researched autism and developmental disorders. Schiffrin specializes in child development, parenting practices and early intervention for children with disabilities. Their research has been published in periodicals such as Cyberpsychology and Behavior, Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, Journal of Personality and Individual Differences, and Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines.