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Life coaching and dentistry: Introducing 'The Wheel of Life'



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Text

How do you feel about your work-life balance? Do some areas of your life need more focus and attention?

I find the term 'work-life balance' an interesting phrase. Who makes the decision about what proportion of our lives are taken up by our work? What exactly is the right balance?

As most of those reading this article are dental professionals, I am sure you agree that we have dedicated a large proportion of our lives to our work, including a number of years studying as undergraduates, then for many, a number of years in further postgraduate education as well as attending occasional courses even on weekends, as we continue to have a thirst to learn more! As a result of this, have we given less attention to other areas of life?

In this article, I would like to introduce one of the first exercises I would do as a life coach with an individual who would like to evaluate

their life goals. In the first piece of this series, I highlighted the importance of identifying our values and living in alignment with them and discussed the difference between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset.

The 'wheel of life' exercise is one of my favourite exercises to guide an individual to a deeper level of awareness around the areas of their life they wish to focus on and set realistic targets and goals in relation to this. It helps you consider each area of your life in turn and assess ways to improve your life balance. As such, it helps you to identify areas that need more attention. It is called the 'wheel of life' because each area of your life is mapped on a circle, like the spokes of a wheel. The concept was originally created by **Paul J. Meyer**.

Essentially, this is an exercise whereby you use a visual tool – as illustrated in Figure 1 – to consider all of the areas you would like to have in your life and label each segment of the wheel so each segment represents one area of life. Some examples include:

- Health
- Career
- Family
- Friends
- Finance and
- Recreation or hobbies.

The areas you choose are personal to each individual and could be anything you wish to work on.

The next stage involves giving a score out of 10 (0 is low and 10 is high) for each of these segments in relation to where you are now, which reflects the amount of attention you are devoting to that area of your life. For example, if you have the segment 'health' on the wheel and are not giving much time to a healthy diet, exercise and sleep, then you may give a low score such as 4 out of 10.

Join the points and create what looks like a spider's web, which highlights visually where there are low scores and which segments have a higher score out of 10. This demonstrates visually where more focus may be needed.

Then identify the score you would like to aim for in each segment. The final step is to plan some realistic goals and how you will achieve these in the segments that need improvement.

This is an incredibly useful exercise, not only in considering your goals, but also to identify exactly which areas of life your goals really need to focus on. We often think we know what we want our goals to be, but do we really understand which 'segments' of the wheel these relate to? After completion of the exercise, a life coach would guide the

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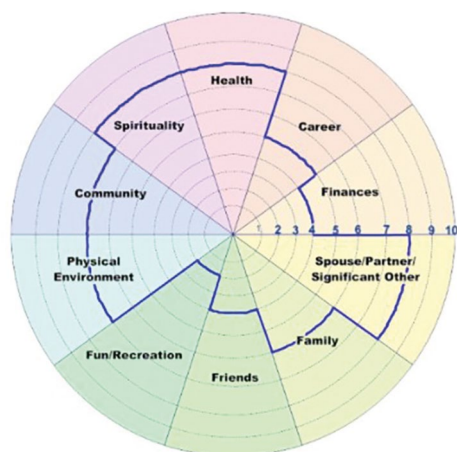


Fig. 1 An example of the wheel of life exercise

individual to consider the actions they need to take to move from the current ratings they have to the ones they wish to attain. These must be realistic and time-specific.

How would it feel to have a score of 10/10?

What would your life look like?

Using the above example of health, to change a score from 4 to 10, an individual would need to make a plan of how to improve this and the actions to take. It is important to understand this is tailored to each individual, so the meaning of health to you may be different to others. It could be mental or physical health. The actions may not be the obvious ones such as diet and fitness but may actually include activities such as practising mindfulness and going for a daily walk to manage stress.

When reviewing the scores, it is helpful to consider which areas could be having an impact on the ones you wish to improve, for example, if the career segment has a high score, there is a need to reflect on the 'balance' between this and the other segments. Have you reached your career goals and now need to focus on action to improve scores in other areas? Is your work a reason for other scores to be lower than you would like them to be? In order for one score to improve, inevitably some of the others

may need to reduce, in order to make this possible.

In order to have attainable goals, you could consider choosing the top three areas you would like to focus on and giving yourself a timescale to make small shifts to progress. A life coach will guide a client to prioritise one area and identify small steps to improving the score to bring it closer to 10.

How balanced is your wheel? Most of us would certainly have scope for improvement and could consider regular reflection to consider how much attention is given to each area of our lives. Throughout different stages of life, the significance we place on each segment will change. From my own personal experience, following completion of my orthodontic training, I was excited to expand the areas of my life that focused on family and friends and to create 'space' for my creative hobbies including more time for cooking, evening art classes, cake decorating and weekly Bollywood dance training. This could only happen when the balance changed and there was more time after completion of exams and training.

Linking the wheel of life exercise to the task of identifying our values is a deeper exercise that will really bring your life into true alignment. If for example, one of your

core values is family, then the aim should be to have a high score in this segment, so the importance of this value is reflected in your wheel.

A value is a belief or principle which drives our actions and behaviours. Our values are the core of our subconscious being and our life map. If our values are not clearly defined in our minds, we cannot live in alignment with what is truly important to us. If we make decisions without understanding if these decisions are in alignment with our values, ultimately this can lead to uncertainty, doubt or lack of contentment.

Consider the following when choosing your top values:

- What do you care about most in your life?
- What is important to you?
- What can you remove from your life and still be true to yourself?

Consider your values and how you can be true to yourself to live in true alignment.

Don't stop until you can be content you are living your best life! ♦

Reference

1. Ahmed N. Alignment: it's not just straightening teeth. *BDJ In Pract* 2024; **37**: 18-19.

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