The Balancing Act: How to Hold Steady in a Fast-Paced Environment

I have been in a management role (as of next month) for 39 years in the maintenance business, both in facilities and manufacturing; and, for many years responsible for both groups at the same time. I believe it is one of the most stressful occupations that exist in business today. No other occupation can rapidly and completely shut down your entire process, business, and profitability of any organization. All major systems that allow a facility or plant to properly operate are, in some fashion, controlled by a facility director or plant engineer, even life safety systems are maintained by us. So with that in mind your day and often nights are full of; it’s broke, it’s hot, it’s cold, it’s dark, it smells, you’re late for a meeting, emails backing up, smart phone is a constant nonstop vibrating pain in the pocket, knocks on your door, alarms...just to name a few!

So with all of that going on, how do you maintain your sanity? For the rest of the article I will try to give you some tips that I used over the years to maintain my balance. Keep in mind that some days you won’t be able to maintain your balance and the sky literally is falling, but overall through the long haul you should be able to keep you head and especially your nose above the water. I have always been able to compartmentalize and prioritize my daily work load and problems which has allowed me to keep at least some of my sanity but many of you struggle with this process. You need to be a pretty good juggler and always be able to understand which balls are rubber and which are glass!

The following tips are not necessarily in any order but hopefully they will give you some things to think about and give you a chance to change the way you deal with the day-to day-chaos that we call work.

- **Define what is really an emergency in your organization** - this will take some discussion with the senior management team. The key here is if everything is an emergency then nothing is an emergency. Develop an organization wide priority system that is applied to all assets and types of problems.

- **Prioritize your daily and weekly “to do list”** - Make a point to re-adjust those priorities daily if needed. The “A, B, C” method works well for millions of managers.

- **Control your daily schedule** - Remember it’s your schedule not someone else’s. Don’t be afraid to say no. I know it tough but try it and you might be surprised. It doesn’t always work with your boss, but sometimes it does.

- **Mange your meeting schedule, don’t let it manage you** – There are two components here. One is don’t always accept the invitation and the second is block out fake meeting times during the day so others cannot suck all of the available work time out of your calendars. If they see all of your available time they will take it every time.
- **Delegate some of your authority and work tasks** - Quite often your subordinates and assistants can do the things you do and often, do it better. So let them; and now you can concentrate on the tasks that only you can or should be doing.

- **Don’t answer your phone!** - I know this one is tough because all of us have become addicted to our Smartphones for calls, emails, and texts. The key here is when you’re busy, in a meeting, or doing some really important, don’t answer the phone. If the fire alarm is not going off and the power is still on it probably can wait a few minutes. Also it’s really rude when you are conducting business with other employees. You just told them they aren’t as important as the person on the phone!

- **Restructure you processes from a manual system to an automatic system** - Can that daily or weekly report be generated automatically or by someone else?

- **Create quiet time for yourself during the day and week** - This is time to work on things important to you and also do something we don’t do enough of is “think!” Yes think you’re the boss think and develop plans of how you are going to lead your team.

- **Honor private and personal time** - This applies to you and your employees. We all have families and interests that help to keep us sane. Respect that, working 60 hours a week seldom makes things better. Changing how you do things does.

Last thought, let the dog wag the tail not the tail wagging the dog.