

Seven Principles for Living in Balance



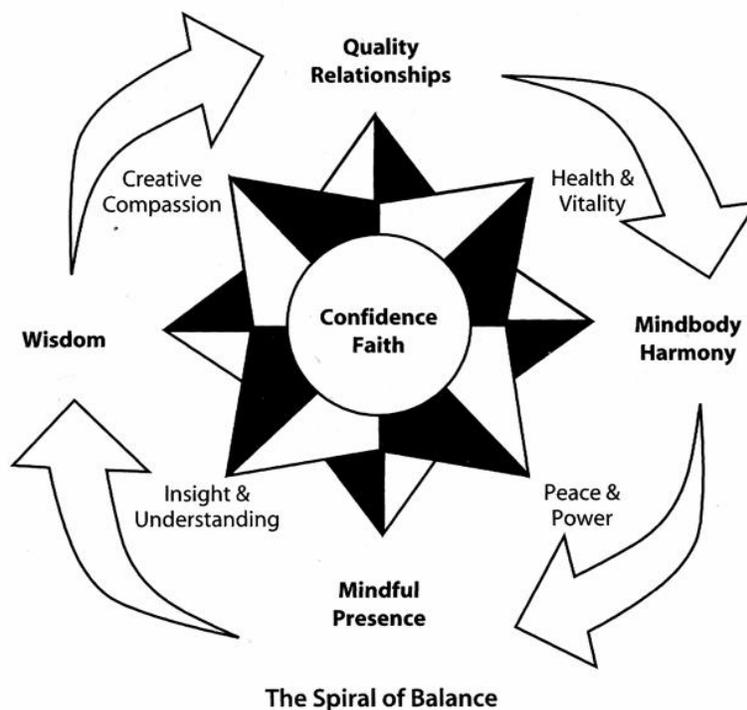
By Dr. Joel and Michelle Levey

"If you feel that you are living in a time of disintegration, your activities will be fearful and violent; If you feel that you are living in a time of reintegration and evolutionary emergence, your activities will be more open and filled with hope and wonder.

--William Irwin Thompson

In this ebook, we'd like to offer you another set of lenses to illuminate your pathways toward balance. This framework is drawn from the results of numerous studies, conducted over the past twenty years, that have searched for clues to the quality of lifestyles most conducive to balance and "optimal health." Research shows that when faced with major life changes, 5 to 10 percent of the population actually breaks down, gets sick, or dies. At the other end of the change resilience continuum, however, are a very interesting 5 to 10 percent of people who actually come more alive and thrive when confronted with significant life changes. Considerable attention has been given to studying these fortunate people who actually thrive on change, and this research reveals a number of common factors that help them to maintain their health and balance.

Foremost among these studies are the pioneering works of Dr. Krobasa at the City University of New York, and a five year Sound-Mind, Sound-Body research project conducted by Kenneth Pelletier, M.D., Director of Stanford University's Corporate Health Program. This groundbreaking research project, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, identified the central characteristics that are the basis of optimal health.



Analyzing the findings of these and related studies, seven key principles emerge for living in balance. You'll find that we have touched on these issues throughout the book, for each of these elements reflects a high level of conscious awareness or "mindfulness," a more "whole systems" way of relating to the world, and a spiritually and socially attuned "altruistic" inclination. These seven principles are: attitude, accountability, commitment, supportive relationships, service, personal mastery, and faith.

1. Attitude

Do we view the stressful changes of our daily lives as a threat, or as a challenge and opportunity? People who are able to take change in stride and respond in a balanced way tend to hold a personally empowered and self-encouraging attitude. They have the confidence and trust that they can handle

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challenging situations and positively affect the course of their lives. They view change as an opportunity, not as a threat.

A reporter once asked Albert Einstein: “Dr. Einstein, if you could ask the universe a single question and receive a direct reply, what would you ask?” His reply came swiftly, as though he had often pondered the question for a long time: “Is the Universe friendly?”

Pause for a moment to reflect upon Einstein’s question. What do you think? How would you live if the universe were truly friendly and supportive of you?

Moment to moment, the attitudinal lenses that you choose to wear color your world for better or for worse. Experience the difference between being appreciative or being critical, or between viewing yourself as a victim, or holding a more empowered attitude.

Adopting an optimistic attitude toward the universe at large and the immediate challenges you face allows you to tap into a greater reservoir of creative energy potential that helps you maintain an even. The first step is to recognize the attitude you are holding, and notice whether it diminishes or enhances your energy and effectiveness. Then, without sacrificing realism, experiment with embodying a more positive outlook that will keep you buoyant and balanced on the sea of constant change.

“We who lived in concentration camps can remember those who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a person but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances – to choose one’s own way.”

-Victor Frankl

2. Accountability

Folks who live generally in balance focus on what *they can* do, and don't lose energy spinning their wheels or getting tied up in knots over what is outside their control. At the same time, they hold a strongly accountable point of view, don't avoid problems, and are willing to own the part they play in a situation.

To get a sense for this, draw three concentric circles on a piece of paper. Label the inner circle "control" and in this circle write or think about all the things in your life that you have direct control over. Next, label the second circle "influence." Here identify all the things in your life that you don't have total control over, but that you can influence by your actions. Now, label the third and largest circle "Appreciate" or "Learn from." Within this circle, pause to note all the factors and forces in your life that are too large, complex, or distant for you to feel much of a sense of influence over. Many of these forces, such as the powerful realities of the weather, taxes, or organizational bureaucracy are beyond your direct control or even your influence. Yet many people exhaust themselves struggling against, worrying, or complaining about these large and unwieldy forces.

"People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want and if they can't find them, make them."

-George Bernard Shaw

A wiser, more balanced approach is to focus attention on those aspects of our life-work-environment-relationships that we can better learn from, influence, or even control, and allow ourselves to better understand and appreciate the large mysterious forces that are too complex to feel much control over. St. Francis expressed this balanced awareness in his prayer: "God, Grant me the serenity

to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

In our own work as coaches, facilitators, and trainers with individuals, teams, and organizations, we often remind people to focus on those factors that they can really get some leverage on. Understanding that we can't cover the thorny earth with leather, we concentrate our efforts to make shoes. Realizing that the bureaucracy in our organizations is difficult to change, we mobilize people at a grass-roots or team level, and identify ways that we can improve things in the department or area that we do have some control or influence over. Adopting an “accountable” approach to change means being mindful of where we can expand our circle of control and our circle of influence. This also means being mindful of our often unconscious beliefs, assumptions, or attitudes regarding the larger forces in our lives and finding more balanced, learningful, or appreciative ways to relate to them.

Again we are reminded that when we are aware we have a choice, and that holding an accountable point of view brings our life more into control and balance by focusing on where we can get leverage and where we can make a difference.

3. Commitment

Balanced people live and work with a strong and clear sense of purpose. They view themselves as having a meaningful role to fulfill and hold a strong inner belief in its importance.

George Bernard Shaw exemplified the passion and spirit of this when he declared: “This is the true joy in life--that being used for a purpose recognized by

yourself as a mighty one. That being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die. For the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It's sort of a splendid torch which I've got to hold up for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."

Commitment brings balance by giving more focus and clarity of purpose to your life. It operates like a plumb line, helping you stay tuned to what has meaning and importance, increasing your energy and attention while reducing distraction. When you know what you are committed to you'll be better able to set and stick to priorities, to recognize and honor limits, and to live in a way that is in integrity with your deepest beliefs.

"When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds; your mind transcends limitations; your consciousness expands in every direction; and you find yourself in a great, new and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be."

-Patanjali

4. Supportive Relationships

At the core of our being, we are social creatures who thrive on meaningful, caring, and affirming contact with others. While finding a balance of personal time

and social or family time is crucial, the importance of social contact for assuring life balance is a key element not to be over looked.

One striking example of the importance of supportive relationships in our lives is that the risk factors for a person who is lonely are far greater than for a person who smokes, drinks, eats a poor diet, and doesn't get any exercise! We've already talked about the health-enhancing effects of support networks in Chapter 10 and community in Chapter 12. The main point here is that people who have supportive networks of close relations and friends do much better in handling life's stresses than those who feel alone, isolated, and unsupported.

5. Service

We all know how good we feel when we do something to help others. Each time we do, we tap the energy of love and compassion that is fundamental to life. Highly change-resilient people view service as their true mission in life, and hold material wealth and success as secondary to helping others. They have a strong sense of belonging and understand the value of nurturing relationships with family, friends, coworkers, and community.

"The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

-Albert Schweitzer

Many people have discovered that making time in their lives to be of service to others provides a quality of joy and satisfaction that is deeply renewing. We continue to learn more and more about balance by realizing that in serving the needs of others from a selfless place of caring and connectedness, many of our own deepest needs can also be fulfilled.

6. Personal Mastery

People who understand the importance of personal development and who have cultivated a high degree of self mastery are the ones most able to sail through challenging times with confident balance. They've learned to deeply listen and respond skillfully to the subtle whispers that warn them when they are drifting out of balance. As a result, they are more likely to eat when they are hungry, and to rest and renew themselves when they are tired. By recognizing and reducing the harmful accumulations of stress, they are able to live in a more balanced, and more disease resistant way. In the process of developing the mindfulness necessary to recognize and master stress, we can also deepen our mind-body-spirit connection as a whole. This allows us to gain the inner strength and understanding necessary to meet every situation in a more balanced, centered way.

One sign of effective personal energy management is that people are able to maintain optimal energy levels throughout the day without dependence upon the use of such stimulants as caffeine, sugar, and nicotine. As we have already discussed, although stimulants appear to offer us "free energy," they actually drive the system out of balance at our expense. As a result, the body has

"As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world...as in being able to remake ourselves."

-Mahatma Gandhi

to expend more energy to restore the imbalance caused by them. Instead of relying on counterproductive stimulants, "balance masters" choose options such as frequent exercise and practicing self renewing and revitalizing skills that prevent the accumulation of stress, and bring a

higher degree of self-confidence, self-control, self-acceptance, and self-respect. Like skills in any domain, such personal skills are developed gradually over time through discipline, practice, coaching, and proper instruction.

7. Faith

A spiritual outlook toward life is common among people who live in balance. Holding a spiritual frame of reference or reverence develops our faith, confidence, and trust, and reduces the intensity of toxic, worrisome emotions and destructive behaviors. People with a deep spiritual perspective often say that it is their faith that helps them to see their lives within a larger perspective and gives them a sense of belonging to a greater whole. For many, their spirituality is anchored in the fellowship, community, and worship associated with their church, synagogue, temple, mosque, or meditation group. For others, the spiritual grounding of their lives may be found in communion with nature, or through their love for family and friends, or through service to others.

“Faith is the opening of all sides and every level of one’s life to the Divine in-flow..”

-Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Faith allows us to reach out and take refuge in our connectedness to a larger, deeper reality and source than our tiny personal selves. By remembering to open our hearts and minds to affirm the link in spirit between our personal identities and our universal nature, we shift the center of gravity in our lives more toward authentic balance.

Compassionate Awareness

These studies on change resilience reveal a number of interesting findings about living in harmony and balance:

1. Attention to diet, exercise, rest and stress management alone will not assure optimal well-being.
2. Living with a strong self-centered preoccupation with individualistic and narrowly narcissistic concerns seriously compromises the quality of health, life balance, and performance, and reduces our adaptability and change resilience. The more out of touch, or unfeeling we are (regarding ourselves, our relationships, society or environment), the more dangerously at risk we are.
3. Learning to quiet one's body and mind, and to raise or deepen the quality of our mindful awareness is the essential first step toward living in balance, realizing optimal health and gaining the deep guiding insights that nourish our lives with inspiration and meaning.

What stands out as we consider the above seven elements is that they each speak to living with both a high quality of awareness and a deeper sense of compassion and caring. Under stress we tend to get tense in mind and body. Our awareness narrows and constricts. As we tense up, shut down, and narrow our focus we become more ignorant of and oblivious to what is going on around and within us. We implode into self-centered, "me first" thinking and behavior. If we are really in danger, these negative strategies serve only to increase our vulnerability.

However, by recognizing the tendency to implode and constrict, we can choose instead to more quickly relax, center ourselves and actually expand our

thinking and awareness to encompass and see clearly the reality of the whole situation that we are in the midst of.

Reflection

Pause now for a few moments to reflect on the following questions:

- Which of these seven principles of living a balanced life are presently strong in your life?
- Which of these principles would it be wise for you to pay more attention to in order to give you more leverage for living your life and approaching your work in a more balanced way?

It is always heartening to see how deeply impactful these seven principles are when we present them to our corporate clients that we work with. People generally recognize their wisdom and feel that their own inner intelligence, and their core personal and spiritual values are deeply affirmed and renewed by these findings. With awareness they can begin to shift their priorities to incorporate more of these principles into their lives.

Given that the price we pay for not practicing them are so high, and the benefits are so great, many managers and teams in the organizations we work with have begun to explore how they might practice these principles more conscientiously within the corporate culture. For example, at Travelers-Aetna Insurance and Hewlett-Packard, some of the people on the teams we've worked with started exercising together at lunch time or bringing in healthy snacks. Others, in various organizations, have launched community service team-building

projects, and many take time for prayer or meditation together and discuss how their spiritual life fits in at work. After learning these principles, many people recognize that their network of support has been deteriorating and take a more active role in rebuilding friendships.

Many people also take these principles home to share with their spouses, kids, significant others, church or community groups. Again and again, we hear that this shared dialogue is a very meaningful forum for helping families come up with strategies to develop a healthier, more balanced lifestyle by clarifying priorities and identifying tangible ways to bring greater harmony and balance alive.

Who are the people in your life and work with whom you would like to have this conversation? Remember, health, harmony, and balance in our lives is not a solitary pursuit--self-centered and isolated people cope poorly with change and stress, and are in great danger of having the quality of their health-work-families-relationships disintegrate.

Now that you have learned these seven factors, you can use them regularly as a reference check-point to monitor how you're doing on the course to balance. Like a compass, they will give you reliably clear direction to guide your way home.

About the Authors



Dr. Joel & Michelle Levey have devoted their lives to exploring the frontiers of extraordinary human performance and their pioneering work spans many disciplines.

They are co-founders of Seattle-based: WisdomatWork.com; InnerWork Technologies, Inc.; The International Center for Corporate Culture & Organizational Health; and SportsMind, Inc..

Over the past 30 years their work in the world has led them to work with leaders and teams in over 200 leading organizations around the globe including: NASA, MIT, World Bank, SRI International, Intel, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, Qualcomm, Intuit, Phillips-ATL, Abbott Labs, Ciba-Geigy, Rhone-Poulenc Rorer, Johnson & Johnson, Gulf, Shell, Petro Canada, Imperial Oil; Washington Mutual Bank, Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound, Swedish Medical Center, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Weyerhaeuser, Menninger Foundation, Boeing, Seattle Center, Miraval Resort, and Five Mountains Foundation Hawai'i.

Joel & Michelle have directed clinical programs (Biofeedback, Stress Management, Pain Management, Psychophysiological Therapy, Hospice Training) for Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound and Children's Medical Center in Seattle, lectured at dozens of Universities and medical schools, served as faculty at Antioch & Bastyr Universities, and the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Ahmedabad India, and as core faculty for the International Center for Organization Design and the World Business Academy.

Their work in "complementary & alternative medicine" (CAM) and in "meditation & medicine" has inspired faculty and students at the University of Washington School of Medicine and School of Nursing, Bastyr University, Antioch University, Washburn University, University of Minn. Center for Spirituality & Healing, and American Medical Student Association.

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The Leveys have coached a number of Olympic and World Class champions and designed & directed biocybernautic training for the US Army Green Berets' acclaimed "Ultimate Warrior Training Program", aka "Jedi Warrior." This six-month full-time training program was described by West Point leaders as, "The most exquisite orchestration of human technology that we have ever seen." Michael Murphy & George Leonard, founders of the Esalen Institute, praised this work, saying, "Jedi Warrior was the most extensive and advance leadership development program to be offered in modern times."

The Institute of Noetic Sciences--for whom they have participated in numerous research colloquiums--honored them as leading contemporary "teachers of transformation" for their work in mind-fitness and extraordinary human performance.

The Leveys' published works have been translated into 9 languages and include: *Living in Balance: A Dynamic Approach for Creating Harmony & Wholeness in a Chaotic World*; *Wisdom at Work*; *A Treasury of Tools for Cultivating Clarity, Kindness, & Resilience*; *A Moment to Relax*; *The Fine Arts of Relaxation, Concentration, and Meditation: Ancient Skills for Modern Minds*; *Simple Meditation & Relaxation*; *Luminous Mind and Corporate Culture & Organizational Health: A Critical Analysis of How Workplace Culture Influences Business Success*.

They have contributed chapters to many anthologies including: *Learning Organizations*; *Voices on the Threshold of Tomorrow*; *Intuition at Work*; *Community Building in Business*; *Rediscovering the Soul in Business*; and *The New Bottom Line*.

Joel & Michelle are active in interfaith community work with a diversity of leaders from various faith traditions and social justice movements, and are founders of the International Center for Contemplative Inquiry.

The Dalai Lama has been an advisor and supporter on a number of the Leveys' projects and has encouraged them in their work and teachings saying, "You are presently engaged in work that has great prospects for bringing the inner sciences and technologies of human development and transformation to a very wide section of people who may not under ordinary circumstances come into contact with these teachings."

The Leveys have a base in Seattle as well as Hawaii where they steward The Kohala Sanctuary, a beautiful conference center and gathering place in the Aloha Spirit and organic permaculture farm in North Kohala on the northern tip of the Island of Hawai'i. They work with organizations and communities around the globe to inspire people to deepen the wisdom, wonder, compassion, resilience, and creativity they bring to life.

For more information, visit www.self-guided.com