

SLOW DOWN...on the INSIDE

AN EXCERPT FROM NURTURING THE SOUL OF YOUR FAMILY

Think slow is for slackers? I used to think so, too.

Slowing down and doing less are easier said than done, and they require a radical paradigm shift for most of us. To start, we have to distinguish our inner life from our outward productivity in order to create a lifestyle that sustains us rather than wears us out.

When I was thirty years old, I was a public relations director in a very stressful job. I fit the persona of an overachiever, and I loved the strokes that came with overachieving; I was addicted to having a superbusy mind, schedule, and life. I was also exhausted and frankly doubted I could sustain this pace (really, this level of mental activity — or insanity). Over time, my job, relationships, and well-being were all suffering from my speeded-up life.

So I began working with a great therapist named Frances — she was really a presence coach. Frances teaches clients how to slow down on the inside so that you can actually be more effective and wise in all areas of your life. For the longest time, I thought, “This will never work for me. She just doesn’t understand my world. How can I slow down and still get things done?” Successfully juggling and anticipating solutions for ten different projects simultaneously was my hallmark! Slowly I integrated her coaching into my life, and I began to understand the connection between my inner state of being and how I see and respond to my outer world. As I cultivated more awareness for my inner world, it had a huge impact: I lived more in the present, slowed down my thinking, decreased anxiety, and improved my mood in large part by creating more space between my thoughts and my reactions. From stillness also came discernment: I began to see what really mattered to me, and my life purpose and path became clear.

My work with Frances during those years led directly to my work today. It informed the model for balanced living that I teach and try to live by. I have distilled this work into five balanced-living insights: practice “good is good enough,” learn to manage your energy, ask for help, practice self-care, and become comfortable saying no. Integrating these five practices or skills into your life can have a profound impact, and

they have helped my clients to reclaim their lives, so they are in the driver's seat.

Strategies and Insights for Balanced Living

1. PRACTICE "GOOD IS GOOD ENOUGH." Let go of expectations and the need to please — whether that's about housework, social events, exercise, volunteering, work, or kids' activities. This practice isn't about being lazy or lowering your standards; it's about accepting your best effort for a given task as good enough, so you can devote your time and energy to what matters most, in the moment and at your current life stage. Preparing for your son's fourth birthday party? Invite everyone who matters in his world and serve popcorn and popsicles in the park.
2. LEARN TO MANAGE YOUR ENERGY. When you evaluate the tasks or activities before you, see them in terms of energy, not time. These are not the same, and learning to manage our energy is more important. Some people, situations, and things take more mental and emotional energy than others — such as lunch with a friend who just lost her mom — and we need to allow for this. We can first ask: What today (or in my life) is most important to me? What drains me? What fuels me? What do I need to release? This helps us set our priorities and direct our energy more purposefully and effectively.
3. ASK FOR HELP. This is a biggie, and it can be life changing for those of us who are predisposed to go it alone. But we're all interconnected, and miracles can happen when we allow support into our lives and learn to delegate. Asking for support might mean tapping a potential mentor for advice or asking your kids to help prepare dinner. Sometimes it's help for an actual task, and at other times it may be emotional support as you weather a crisis or challenge. Asking for support can make all the difference in how you experience your journey.
4. PRACTICE SELF-CARE. Don't forget to add your own needs to your daily and weekly to-do lists. Ask: What do I need right now to support my physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being? Then, *tune in, listen, and respond.*

Often, the kindest form of self-care is not overcommitting and overscheduling. Release self-criticism or judgment that you aren't doing enough, whether that's keeping the house clean or starting a new project at work; this is an essential way to nurture and be more kind to ourselves.

5. BECOME COMFORTABLE SAYING NO. Are you comfortable saying no and not overcommitting? Saying no — to volunteer requests, extracurricular activities, an extra work project, unnecessary travel or trips — is one way we set limits and maintain boundaries. We will need to say no many times in our lives. However, most people find that the more they say no to things that are draining them or pulling them into overwork or overwhelm, the more space they have to say yes to those things that really matter — like reconnecting with your partner or dedicating time to getting your financial house in order. Also, saying no gracefully is a learned skill and it takes practice; there are many ways to do so. For instance, simple is often best; don't trot out a list of excuses. Either decline directly and politely (“No, thanks, I'll have to pass on that”) or keep the reason simple (“My time is already committed”). You can also say yes in a limited way (“I can't do that, but I could do this...”) or even ask for more time to decide (“Can I get back to you?”). If you're worried the other person will take the answer no as a personal rejection, clarify what you're declining (“I'd love to see you, but this day won't work for me”). For more on this, see the “Nine Creative Ways to Say No” list in my book *The Mother's Guide to Self-Renewal*.

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