

WORDS MARK BUNN

ACHIEVING YOUR WORK/ LIFE HIGH

HOW TO GO BEYOND WORK/LIFE BALANCE
TO LOVE YOUR WORK AND YOUR LIFE.

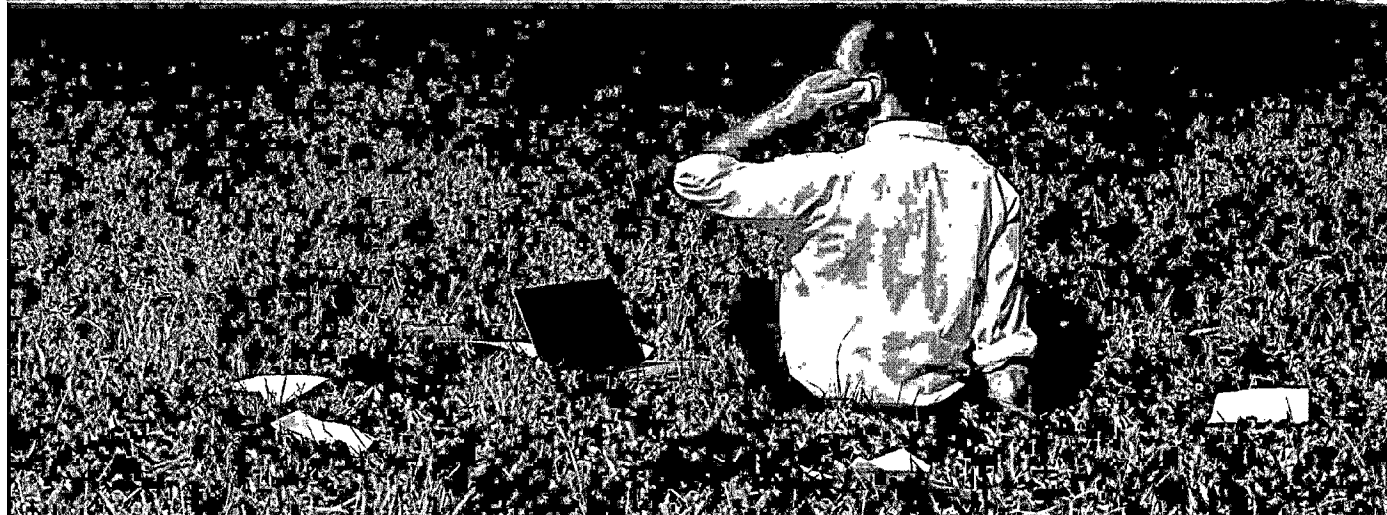
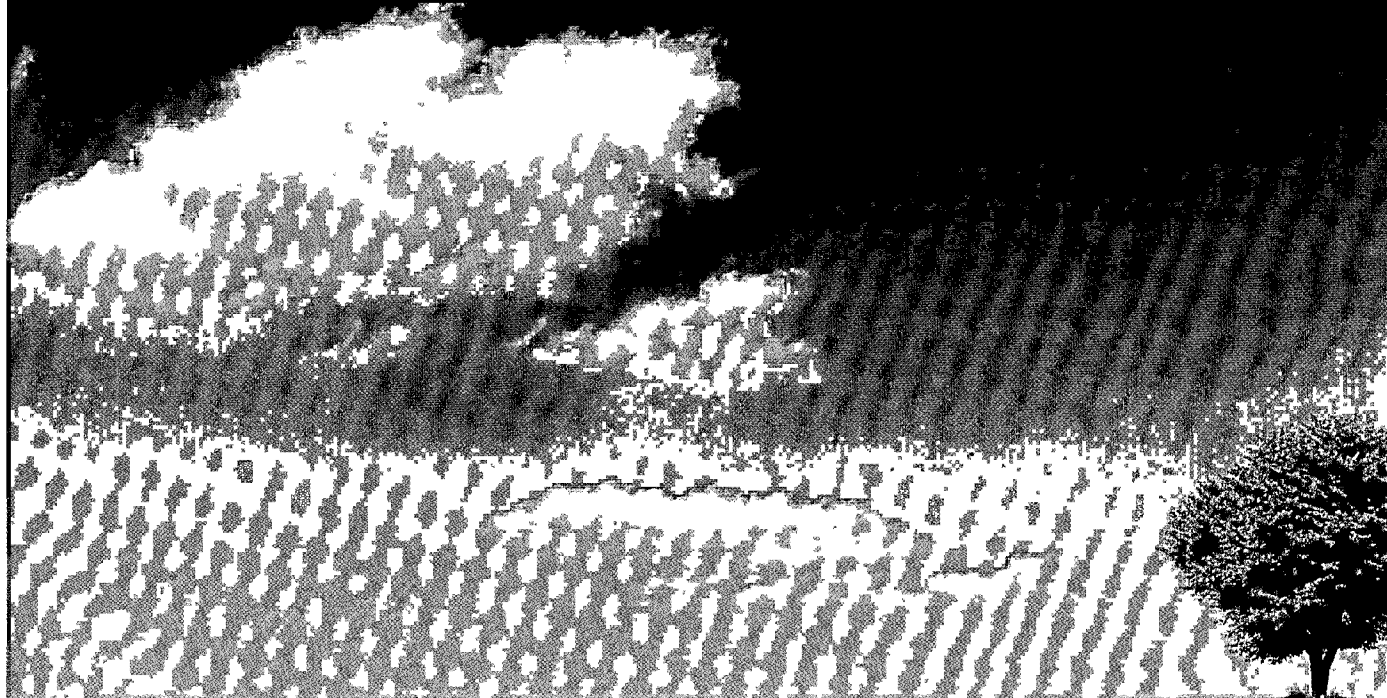


IMAGE: ISTOCKPHOTOS

Stressed? Overworked? Struggling to find that elusive 'balance' between work and life? You are not alone. So why do many of the world's busiest business leaders also enjoy high levels of 'life satisfaction' and personal balance? They achieve this by following key principles of peak performance and personal productivity. Here, we look at three of them.

1 Know your goal (get crystal clear)

Most people think that improving productivity, getting better work/life balance, or working smarter not harder, are about time management or prioritising. However, you cannot prioritise unless you know where you want to go. The Roman philosopher Seneca said, 'Unless you know where you're going, any wind is favourable'.

Research, however, suggests that less than 5 per cent of workers have clear daily and life goals (business leaders might be slightly higher). Most people are busy being busy, but peak performers focus on being productive. Being truly productive all comes down to being crystal clear on what your ideal work/life life looks and feels like.

Action step: Get crystal clear on what you want in life (remember, your work is just one aspect of your life). Take a moment to reflect. Where do you want to be in 10 years' time? What's a perfect day and week for you? Do you want to go on holidays for three months a year? Do you want two kids, five kids, no kids? What does your ideal life look and feel like?

2 Do your 'natural flow-state activities'

Again, before we even consider prioritising, the second key to consistent high-level performance is spending most of our time in our 'natural flow-state' activities. Thousand-year-old Eastern sciences have told students that the highest states of human performance are cultured only when we combine 'doing what we love most' with 'what we naturally do best', that is, our natural talents.

This is the timeless secret to getting in our flow- or zone-state of high performance; the state where we can get more done in two hours than we usually do in two days. The world's highest achievers – whether they're in sport, arts or business – go to work every single day because they love it, they enjoy it, and they want to do what they are uniquely born to do well (with less stress and struggle than others).

Peak performers *do not* work on their weaknesses, they focus on their strengths.

They refine their unique skills and talents, until they are the best in their field.

Action step: Focus on your strengths (don't work on your weaknesses) and restructure things until the majority of your work and life is spent in activities you really enjoy, feel passionate about and involve skills that you are naturally good (even great) at.

For your work or vocation, ask yourself, 'what do I really get excited about doing?'. Do you love working with people, with numbers, with technology? Do you love motivating others, being strategic, creating new things, supporting others from behind the scenes? What's one change you can make right now to spend a little bit more of each week doing a work role or activity that you really enjoy?

3 Fry your big fish first

It is only at this point that we get to the age-old time management/prioritising principle; doing what is most important. Be assured, many leaders still fail to do this well.

Do you get sidetracked by distractions, truly small stuff, or always feel like you're putting out fires and not getting to the really important things that drive your organisation's bottom-line results and satisfaction?

Once you know your goal, and you've structured your basic work role and life activities around your flow-state activities, the third key is spending the majority of your time doing the truly important things.

For those who are familiar with the Stephen Covey analogy of the rocks, pebbles and sand, when we fill our time up doing the small things (sand) and/or chasing after the nice things (pebbles), then naturally there will be no room for the really big/important things (rocks).

When we make the time for the really big and important things in our work or in our life, everything else finds a way of fitting in.

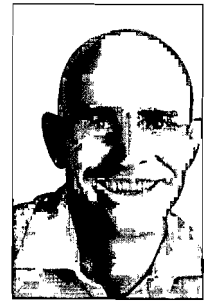
Action step: Focus on the 'big fish' activities that drive 80 per cent of your results (think of Pareto's 80/20 principle). In your personal life, what are the things that are truly important to you? What would you not want to live without?

Get out your diary or electronic organiser now and, where there's some space in it – whether that's in two weeks, two months or six months away – start putting in some of your rocks; those big things you've identified that truly nourish or inspire you.

It may be a special anniversary dinner, a weekend away, a game of golf, or a shopping trip with the girls. As far as your work life, this same process can and should be done with your most important, bottom-line result driving your work activities. **MT**

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