

How to Have More “Imbalance” in Your Life and Experience More Satisfaction

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You’ve heard the sages for healthy living, advocate the balanced diet and balanced exercise. Some financial advisor has encouraged you to maintain the balanced portfolio. Justice stands in most cities with her balanced scales....the ideal.

Is there a place for imbalance? You might consider three kinds of imbalance in your professional and personal lives—one to accept, one to realign or question, and one to passionately embrace as a way of life.

The first imbalance is temporary. When you achieved any serious goal, it required that you focused intensely on the activities necessary to achieve that goal. You remember times you were involved in projects that were not ideal for balance. This kind of imbalance is okay and serves a purpose. Accept it.

The second imbalance comes from the dramatic changes you experience in the technology revolution. You say, “I am spending more time on e-mails than getting tasks done.” “Things have become so frenetic and a lot of what I do seems a waste of time.” You find yourself signing up for the time management sessions at annual conferences hoping to put some healthy balance or control in your personal and professional lives. When you feel angst over this kind of imbalance, it demands your questions, your concern, or changes in your behavior. Question this kind of imbalance or rearrange your priorities.

The third imbalance or the *Law of Imbalance* promises to make the biggest difference in your life. Vilfredo Pareto “discovered” the 80/20 principle about 100 years ago. He simply said that 20% of the people in England owned 80% of the land. This mysterious universal theory proves itself in every industry and endeavor.

Dr. Thomas, my family physician, practices the 20% each time I go to his office. By then I have “assessed” my ailment, read everything on the Internet, talked to others and have developed the worst case scenario. He is consistent. “Okay, let’s start with the simplest first.” He’s always right—his skill and experience tell him that most times the answers lie in a 20% area he knows very well.

What is a definition of your 20%? It is those activities which produce 80% of the results you want from using your three most valuable resources—time, money, and energy (physical and creative). Many times you don’t feel like you get much done because you are doing the 80%.

Think of your own life. Isn’t it true that out of 100% of your clothing, you tend to wear the same 20%? Why? You like these clothes. They serve a purpose—comfort, compliments, or maybe you don’t know. Under that lab coat is your 20% most of the time. Think of your favorite restaurant. Is it surprising that from the whole menu, you probably order around the same 20%? When asked by a friend, “What should I order?” Remember, you are really a limited resource!

Less is more here. Finding the 20% in all your life activities can produce 80% of the results you want—wealth, happiness, enjoyment, satisfaction, making a difference, etc. Richard Koch in his book *The 80/20 Principle* proposes that “80/20 thinking is most valuable encouraging people to pursue high-value/satisfaction activities in both work and play periods, rather than stimulating an exchange of work for play.” How can the *Law of Imbalance* be applied in your practice and your personal life to create the feeling of balance?

1. *Form an Attitude* Believe the 80/20 principle of imbalance. You will start looking for the 20% in your practice and in your personal investments.
2. *Set Your Goals* What do you really want to do with your life and time? If you are practicing medicine the way you want, what would it look like? What is the 20% that would make that happen? Maybe you have not thought about it in all your busyness.
3. *Read Less* You might say, “I already don’t read what all I need to read.” Look at all the journals you receive. If there are ten of them, ask yourself which two are the greatest value, and then read them cover to cover. For the remaining ones, cancel or require that you only read the 20% included in each issue. Ignore the rest. Forget trying to read it all. You just put more stress on yourself
4. *Look Around at Work* Take a good look. 20% of your colleagues, staff and patients give you 80% of the support or satisfaction you need. They are your true advocates. Lesson: take good care of them. In your busyness, do you take your 20% front office people for granted? How about an out-of-blue thank you note to a colleague at the clinic just to acknowledge his/her advocacy? Maybe a call to a patient saying how much cheer he/she brings to the office. Take time? It’s an investment in your 20% giving you the 80% return you want in the long run.
5. *Look Around at Home* The same rules apply to this search for the 20% as it does at work. You have good family and friends, maybe lots of them. But there are those few, the few that would be there no matter what are when—the 20%. Because they are always there, they sometimes get put on the back burner. “I’ll call her next week.” Try calling one of those persons when you finish reading this article. You will feel like you got a lot done today. That’s the result of investing your time in the 20%...less is more.
6. *Keep Current* As you grow your business, it is important to remember the *valuable few* (your values, personality, idea of service). What trends to follow? Do you add staff, remove staff? Each decision is best guided by the 20% since it is impossible in the information/technology age to do it all. Knowing what innovations are out there at least challenges the routines you have established which might lessen your 20%. Looking into eHealth alternatives may be innovative, but contrary to your 20%. Remember, it might also be tweaked to keep you true to the valuable few and make significant changes.

Challenges to the Law of Imbalance in your life

With your stethoscope, you are skilled to find an irregular heartbeat. These signs let you know that you are probably in your 80% and need to question a way out or accept that they are perhaps an undesirable part of achieving the 20%.

1. Tasks other people want you to do that you have no investment in doing.
2. Tasks labeled “urgent.”
3. Some routines.
4. Activities you are not usually good at doing.
5. Activities that keep you busy, but not feeling productive.

6. Activities that take a lot longer than you expected.
7. Things you bought and were not able to say, "That was expensive, but it was worth it."
8. When you find yourself whining all the time.

Support for the Law of Imbalance in your life

You are in your 20% when you are engaged in:

1. Activities that advance your overall purpose in life (this assumes you know what that is)
2. Things you have always wanted to do.
3. Activities that make you feel about yourself.
4. Activities you don't like to do at all, but know they relate to the bigger picture.
5. Hiring people to do the tasks you are not good at or don't like doing.
6. Smiling a lot.

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