Because of the endless challenges you face as a health care leader, you are never finished. There is always more to do. It’s easy to burn out from overwork and endless pressure. Yet, if you lose your balance and allow work to overwhelm your other priorities in life—relationships, interests, physical fitness, families, learning, recreation and hopes for the future—you’re likely to feel depleted, disaffected and even cynical. These feelings drain your energy for work and your everyday effectiveness, both at work and outside of work.

Also, when you lose work-life balance, this sends a message to your team. “Who needs this?” they’ll ask themselves. “Is this the job for me?”

Here are three tools that help you and your team keep your balance on the leadership tightrope:

1. Inspire Work-Life Balance through Personal Example
2. Build Respect for Work-Life Balance within Your Team
3. Keep Perspective by Learning Endlessly

**Inspire Work-Life Balance through Personal Example**

Communicate these attitudes through your personal approach to your work and your life. Be blunt. Make these points explicit to your team and they will appreciate you more than you know:

- “I am more than my job. And so are you.”
- “I can set limits on my work so I have a life. And so can you.”
- “I deserve a break during the day so I can relax and refresh. And so do you.”
- “There’s more to life than work for me and for you.”
- “It’s healthy for all of us to have fun at work.”
- “I can take my work seriously while also taking myself lightly.”
- “I realize I might sometimes drive you to exceed your limits for work, discouraging you from the work-life balance you seek. I’m sorry. I appreciate your help in setting reasonable limits. I want you to feel productive, gratified and satisfied here. I realize that, while this will, I hope, be good for you, it will also be good for the organization.”
Build Respect for Work-Life Balance within Your Team

Take people by surprise at a leadership meeting by proposing this heartwarming and enlightening team-building exercise:

- State your purpose: You want to find out more about each other’s priorities as a basis for strengthening team relationships.
- Ask people to consider this question: “Imagine a wonderful 95th birthday party for you. What would you hope to hear in people’s testimonials about you and your life?” Suggest that people jot down a few messages.
- After a few minutes of reflection, listen to each person’s imaginings.
- Afterward, ask the group:
  - “What themes or patterns emerged?”
  - “What implications do you see for our work together?”

Inevitably, issues related to work-life balance will surface, and people can discuss how to help each other take on reasonable, healthy work commitments that will enable them to live according to their dreams.

Keep Perspective by Learning Endlessly

Ask these questions of yourself. Also, build your team by engaging them in addressing these questions:

- To what extent do I stay in my comfort zone?
- What have I learned lately?
- How will I seek further information and feedback?
- How much time do I spend learning?
- When was the last time I created an experiment so I could learn from the experience?
- How do I take advantage of informal learning opportunities?
- What can I learn that will renew me?
Coaching on Coaching

To help the people around you advance the organization’s priorities, you will need to play the role of coach. You can’t call every shot or do every task. There is simply far too much to do. Your only hope lies in developing the capacities and competencies of the people around you, creating a multiplier effect in terms of organizational capability.

Are you an effective coach? Assess your coaching attitudes and behaviors using these 10 tips....

1. Ask questions. Help managers share more by asking open-ended questions rather than yes-no ones. Talk less and question more.

2. Don’t judge. People shut down if they feel criticized or labeled. Make sure you state your feedback and observations constructively.

3. Listen carefully. Try to absorb the meaning behind the words. Ask people to explain to be sure you understand. “Tell me more” is a non-threatening way to get people to elaborate.

4. Maintain an open mind. Suspend disbelief; try to understand the manager’s approach if it differs from yours. Give people space to experiment and learn.

5. Praise and build on their ideas. “Yes!” and “good idea!” encourage people to continue the dialogue.

6. Focus on the person. Talk about yourself and your experiences sparingly. You won’t develop others by talking about yourself at length.

7. Slow down. People won’t open up if they feel rushed. Most people need time to assemble their thoughts, feelings and ideas.

8. Eliminate distractions. Managers will not feel valued if you are doing other things when you are supposed to be talking with them. Don’t let phones, beepers, e-mail alerts or other people interrupt this protected time.

9. Less is more. People can’t focus on many instructions or many issues at once. Center each discussion on one or two key topics, and build on them in later discussions.

10. Be supportive. Make sure you are not coming across as intimidating or threatening when you offer suggestions. If you want something done in a certain way, make sure you explain how and why. Motivation by fear is notoriously ineffective.