



ASK THE PEACE CAREERS COACH

By David J. Smith

Striving for work-life balance is increasingly studied and talked about in all employment settings. The belief is that if one works incessantly without limits, they can threaten their physical and emotional health and thereby set themselves up for serious health problems, both physical and psychological, later in life. Employers are starting to be concerned about this. Shawn Burn, Ph.D. in Psychology Today (9/7/15) writes "Workplaces that support employee wellbeing and allow time for employee recovery are part of creating a sustainable workforce where employees don't become burned-out and ineffective." In other words, employers that recognize the importance of balance understand that having a healthy workforce leads to better work.

But there is a conundrum here. Younger workers are often willing, physically able, and have lifestyles and freedom from obligations (such as no children) that allow them to work crazy hours without breaks or recreation. Part of this is thought to be generational, though there is some evidence that Millennials are looking for balance ("Millennials want a work-life balance. Their bosses just don't know why," Washington Post, 5/5/15). Moreover, if you are committed to peace work, your passion is often in overdrive, particularly at a time when the political and social climate demands everyone to be "all in." You might think you are indestructible: "I can work without much sleep and still get it all done! I just need another Red Bull." Biology strongly indicates otherwise, and the liberties we take with our health in our 20s come back to haunt us in our 50s (trust me, I know).

This can present a dilemma in applying for a job. How should you present yourself in an interview? Do you leave the impression that you are available all the time and can be called on at all hours of the day or night? Or do you indicate that you are fully dedicated to the job, but need to have "down time" to recharge your batteries, exercise, read or write, refocus, think about "big ideas," volunteer, and be a part of a greater community and your family?

Clearly, the latter is the better approach. It is how it is presented that is so important. Make the point that your off hours are not about being a "slug" but rather helps you be a better person (and employee). Your off hours directly benefit your work environment by providing you with the space and opportunity to seek balance in life. This suggests that both sides of you – the professional and personal – support each other – a Yin and Yang approach. In that context, a prospective employer should recognize that your maturity and self-awareness are valuable to their organization and you are the employee for them. And if they don't, maybe it's not the place for you.