

## Business, Balance, and Learning to Live by David C. Bental

*As a 12 year-old boy, he made a life-changing decision about life's priorities. It became the foundation for his life.*

When I was a 12 year-old boy, I played goalkeeper for a very good soccer team. It had many notable benefits. I particularly enjoyed the fact that we usually won our games! In addition, I didn't have to work very hard in my position, because most of the time, the ball was in the other team's end of the field. However, there was one thing that I didn't like about our team. As I stood on field, with lots of time on my hands, I had a good view of the sidelines. Each week, as I surveyed the scene, I noticed that all the other dads were there, cheering for their sons. All the dads were at the game, except for mine. He was at work.

As I stood in goal, I felt both lonely and sad. Game after game this happened, all season long. Then, one day, standing on the grass at Elm Park, I made a life-changing decision. I resolved that things would be different if I ever had kids of my own. I determined that I would be a part of our kids' lives, and that I would not let my career dominate my life (at least not the same way as my father's had done). As a 12-year-old boy, I decided that I wanted to live a balanced life.



Years later, at university, I asked one of my professors if he thought it were possible to live a balanced life, and also be successful in business. Without hesitation, he assured me that it was impossible. I responded by telling him: "Then I guess I won't be successful." Ever since that day, I have been trying to prove him wrong.

These two experiences have had a significant influence on how I have lived my life. They have propelled me to live life differently. I am thankful that I made these two decisions when I was much younger. They gave me the opportunity to develop life patterns that have helped keep me from being completely overwhelmed by the challenges and opportunities of my career.

As I write this, I am contemplating my 52nd birthday. To be honest, as I look back over my life, I confess that I have often failed to live up to my own expectations. However, the resolutions which I made as a boy, and as a university student, have provided a foundation upon which I have endeavored to build my life patterns. The roots of my commitment run deep, and they are galvanized by the disappointments and hurts I felt as a child.

## **Commitment**

I think that the critical first step to living a life of balance is deciding that it is more important than other measures of "success." If the pursuit of power, prestige, position, possessions, or even pleasure are your primary goals, then they will dominate your life. If having these things are more important to you than balance, then they will win. Thirty years ago, I made a commitment that these pursuits would not be permitted to rule my life. It is one of the most important decisions I have ever made.

Because we all tend to move towards our definition of success, we will make sacrifices to achieve what we perceive to be our most important priorities. Therefore, it is essential to have a conviction regarding what you want and expect from your life. I believe making a commitment to live life differently and to choose a life of balance, not just material success, is the best place to start. I am all for working hard, but at what cost? I decided I didn't want to sacrifice my kids on the altar of career [success](#). How about you? Have you decided what limits to place on your career?

## **Perspective**

When I was President of Dominion Construction, two good friends, Bob Kuhn and Carson Pue, invited me to attend a twenty-four-hour prayer retreat at "The Abbey" in Mission, British Columbia. I was initially intimidated by the idea of spending a full day way out in the country, immersed in the domain of forty Jesuit priests. I wondered if I could cope with the silent meals, the ritual ringing of church bells, and a whole day devoted to praying. It was a long way from the office buildings and busy schedule of meetings that I was accustomed to! My friends promised to shepherd me through the day, and so I went.

It was an amazingly restorative experience. We walked and talked. We read and we rested. We took time to read, pray, and eat. Much to my surprise, the day flew by! Near the end of our time away, I picked up a small piece of slate from the ground as we walked a quiet trail in the woods. The cares of my world back home seemed so distant. I asked if I could take the small rock home with me. I wanted a tangible reminder, to put on my desk, to help me remember that life is more than work, and that it doesn't have to be so hectic. You see, I had discovered a whole new perspective, simply by stepping out of the rat race for a single day. Perspective is what we need, so that we can gain more wisdom prior to re-entering the battle of everyday living.

## **Sabbath**

This is not unlike the way I think we should experience Sabbath each week. When I was in high school, I learned from my parents the importance of not studying on Sunday. They modeled it for me, encouraged me to take a day each week to break my routine, and to be thankful, to rest and to thank God. This was a good foundation, but I observed a Sunday off more as a matter of duty and less as a way of finding real perspective. Too often, I just played hockey or football with my friends all afternoon. I seldom experienced anything that looked like rest.

Recently, I experienced a Sabbath day which was much more than I think God intended for us to enjoy. I was at a mountain lodge on a Saturday evening. I had spoken for a group of sales professionals that day. I retired early, falling into a sound sleep. The next morning, I awakened, well rested, without my alarm. I sat by the window, and enjoyed the snowflakes gently swirling outside my window. I began the day by briefly reading my Bible and praying. I sauntered down to the dining room and had a healthy breakfast, seated by an open fire, as I read a thought-provoking article about faith and leadership. After driving to the airport, I flew home. En route, I enjoyed encouraging the young woman seated beside me as she pondered her career. I then read a few more pages of Phillip Yancey's book on prayer, and, before long, I was back home.

Our dog and I then went for a pleasant run along the river, uplifted by the worship music my son had helped me download to my iPod. After a short nap and a shower, my wife and I accompanied two of our daughters as we all drove to White Rock where we enjoyed a contemporary, Sunday evening, church service. Afterwards, we shared a light meal together at a local restaurant. I was in bed before ten o'clock, that evening.

Reflecting on that day, it occurred to me that taking a Sabbath rest need not be an interruption in our lives. In fact, one day out of seven is approximately fifteen percent of our week.

This had never occurred to me before! I wondered why I didn't I cherish these days more.

Why had I never thought of these days as the real days when we live? The rest of the week is for work. I have now realized that the Sabbath is for living. These are the days which can help us gain a well needed perspective, just as my visit to "The Abbey" did with my two good friends. In addition, they can also enable us to recover the energy we need to pick up the task of daily living again.

As you think about your life, what patterns are you establishing? Will you let your career dominate your life, or will you make a commitment to live a balanced life? Will you get stuck in the rat race, pursuing power, prestige, and the like, or will you develop a pattern which enables you to gain perspective by taking time to retreat? Are you running "flat out," seven days a week, or are you taking time to observe Sabbath times of [rest](#)?

As a boy and as a university student, I decided to live life differently from my father, and from those around me. How about you? Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold, but "be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (*Romans 12:2*). Choose to pursue balance, perspective, and rest. Build life patterns that will sustain you, and enrich your life. I promise you, you won't regret it!