

Quality of "Personal" Life

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This article is Part III in the Quality of Life series. Work Life was addressed in the March 1996 issue of the Bulletin and Home Life was the Wellness topic for the June 1996 Bulletin. Who we are is a balance of the image we present publicly, the person we are at home and the intimate knowledge we have of our private self. Together this creates a whole person functioning in many roles and capable of controlling much of our direction and meaning in life. The most significant single factor in determining our personal life satisfaction is attitude. Our health, relationships, career, responsibilities, and direction all play a part but all are influenced by our attitude. Attitude Individuals can experience many of life's misfortunes and still consider themselves happy, even lucky! Others can live in relative comfort, with few external stresses, and still not be satisfied with life. Adopting an attitude which strives to find the good in self and others, which recognizes and adjusts to human limitations, which accepts and supports the differences in personal value systems, and which establishes and believes in personal priorities this means setting the climate for high quality living!

Health Not many people have perfect health and we may all be able to identify health issues in our lives over which we have little or no control. However, we can control much of our physical well being and can thereby give our bodies a head start at "feeling good". We sometimes overlook the basics. Eating properly, limiting junk food and not skipping meals gives us the energy needed to keep going during the day and the raw materials to renew and repair our bodies at night. A Tim Horton's muffin in the morning or donut at recess time just won't do the job. They will provide a quick fix of sugar and fat and then a drop in blood sugar level, leaving you even more tired. Sleep and rest is another area that we often neglect until it catches up on us! We have too much to do so we "borrow time". We can't add a few more hours to each day; even if we did, we would probably use them up by trying to do even more things. Instead, we take time from leisure and rest and give it to work. Everyone knows that's no way to add quality to life! Rest time should be as well protected as the 9-5 work day. Without giving our bodies adequate rest, we continue to borrow from our future and before we know it we have used up our present. Exercise may be the most neglected of all the basics for good health. After all, who has time to walk or go to the gym? Again, this is a matter of understanding health and setting personal priorities. Our bodies were made to move our whole body that is! Sure we move all day long: walking from the staff room to the class (or maybe even running), walking around to students' desks, getting up, sitting down, getting up again, stretching our arms above our heads to write on the chalk board and even lifting the overhead projector, books, or other teaching paraphernalia. That's not quite what a body needs for exercise. If you have a house pet, you know that you can't keep it in the house or tied on outside all the time. Your body is no different. Muscles need to move, heart rate needs to go up, lungs need to be stretched, circulation needs a boost. You may be surprised to notice what it does to your mood as well! Give it a try. Recreation what's that? Practice for retirement? (At a recent Pre-retirement Seminar a retired teacher warned the audience to finish off all those odd jobs and projects now because they won't have time after they retire.) Who would spend valuable time on recreation? Actually, anyone with a balanced view of life, an understanding of health and a desire to maximize personal quality of life would definitely build in time for pleasurable recreation. A game of tennis, a round of Trivial Pursuit, an evening skating, a few hours working on a favourite craft or hobby all can bring amazing benefits for an overall sense of well-being and general satisfaction with life. Accomplishments outside of work can be very rewarding and activities offer the added bonus of providing the opportunity for socializing or exercising too! Don't underestimate the power of a physical and psychological diversion.

Responsibilities From childhood onward we increase our level of responsibility. This adds pride and enjoyment to life but can also be a source of stress. When we accept too much and the demands infringe upon our time or energy for other necessities the cost outweighs the benefit. There are responsibilities we all accept (family, work, community, finances) but sometimes we take on too much in each of these or other areas. Decisions about sharing the work load are necessary, even when we know that someone else won't quite do the job as perfectly as we would! It is a great feeling to have others trust you with a responsibility because they believe in your competence. Now it may be your chance to let someone else have that great feeling.

Direction Like Alice in Wonderland, if you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there. Or from the wisdom of my Uncle Ernest, if you don't know where you're going, you tend to go overboard. Having direction in life is very important. It keeps you on track, it gives you benchmarks to measure your progress and it provides a goal as a reminder of the reward you are working toward. We set goals and direction in all aspects of life. For example: a relationship goal may be to improve communication and listening skills with family members; a career goal may be to

take on or remove committee responsibilities; a leisure goal could be to pick up a hobby, join a craft class or learn relaxation techniques. In any of these cases the main point is that we know where we're going. (However long it takes for us to get there.)

Compensation for Missing Parts Each of us will have something, or things, missing from the picture of an ideal life. But even though our lives are not perfect we can compensate for the areas with deficits. Maybe the greatest issue is health: our health is not, nor will it ever be, the way we want it. It interferes with what we want to do socially, recreationally and (it seems) in every part of our lives! Well, guess what that requires an attitude readjustment! Look around you. Others with a greater degree of disability have found ways to work around obstacles and still find great pleasure in life. You can too. Be resourceful. Seek input from others if you find yourself in a creative desert. It is certainly to your advantage to keep trying. Socializing, bringing home-made cookies to the staff room and learning new skills are all ways to introduce new things into your life. Identify what's missing, then plan to replace it.

Maximize Resources and Opportunities Time appears to be a determining factor for so many components of our lives but don't let it be a limiting factor in the quality of your personal life. Be aware of the positive and negative lifestyle choices that exist for you every day. Being "multi-phasic" in thought or action is a real bonus when time presents the restrictions. For all of us there are occasions when we can do more than one thing at once. Combine socializing with exercise, or correcting papers with soaking your tired feet, or ironing with watching the news I'm sure you can add endlessly to this list. If you have some really great time-savers, let me know and I can share them with everyone else! The bottom line is to not sacrifice quality living in order to get the job done or to please others. When that happens, the job isn't worth the cost and people can't compensate for the private loss. Make the choices you must to enhance your personal life satisfaction. Claudette Coombs is a Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for teachers. For confidential assistance contact Claudette (Boyd) Coombs (Ext. 265), e-mail: ceboyd@calvin.stemnet.nf.ca or Kathy Burford (Ext. 242), e-mail: kburford@calvin.stemnet.nf.ca, EAP Coordinators.