

## The MS Emotional Wellness Teleseries

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### Creating a Balanced Life

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Today's topic is **Creating a Balanced Life**. Though a balanced life is a common concept used out in the world and many people struggle with it, it's especially challenging when one has a chronic medical condition which limits them in some way, cognitively and/or physically. So, for all of you who have MS, it's important when you take **The Balanced Life Inventory** today that you are gentle and nurturing to yourself. Being harshly self-critical or ashamed will only be demoralizing and will not help you move forward towards creating a balanced life.

#### THE BALANCED LIFE INVENTORY\*\*

##### 1) First, draw a 10-column Bar Graph

Get a piece of regular notebook or printer paper and hold it horizontally. Draw 10 columns across the page, each one about 1" wide and 6" high.

Put a number 1 at the bottom left-hand corner of each column, a 5 on the 1/2 way up the left side of the column and a 10 at the top left-hand corner of the column. You have basically created a bar graph with 10 bars.

The measurement of each bar is 1-10, like a thermometer starting at 1 and

going up to 10. 1 is the lowest, 5 is medium and 10 is the highest rating. Each column/ bar will have a name; write it at the bottom of each column.

See Below.



Column 1 is:

**Physical Care:** This includes sleep, rest breaks, exercise, eating healthy, minimal alcohol, regular medical appointments; taking medication consistently, caring for your appearance (showering, dressing and grooming.) etc.



Column 2 is:

**Inner Attitude:** This includes your way of looking at the world, your acceptance of the MS, your feelings of optimism, gratitude, forgiveness of self and others, letting go of anger, conquering self-defeating thinking, recalibrating your goals rather than giving them up, your self-esteem, etc.



Column 3 is:

**Financial Matters and Personal Papers:** This includes financial areas such as living within your means, paying your bills, getting taxes done, as well as completing papers such as a Will, an Advance Medical Directive; etc.



Column 4 is:

**Family:** Your Relationship with an intimate partner and/or your family members including parents, siblings, cousins. How healthy and connected are your relationships with your partner and your family members?



Column 5 is:

**Social World:** This includes your level of engagement (vs. isolation) with your Friendship Circle and a Support Network. This includes your support network for dealing with MS.



Column 6 is:

**Your Home Space:** This includes how you feel about where you live or your home space. Does it feel good, peaceful, comfortable or is it cluttered or unappealing in a way that effects you negatively?



Column 7 is:

**Your Work Life** (if you are no longer able to work, skip this column) How happy are you on your job? How fulfilled are you with your work?



Column 8 is:

## **Hobbies, Learning, Creativity**

This includes endeavors that interest you and that you enjoy; these activities engage your talents, skills and strengths. It may be a hobby, taking a class, reading books, water coloring painting, studying genealogy, etc. These need to be recalibrated or substituted with something else if MS makes them not doable.



Column 9 is:

**Higher Purpose or Meaning:** This includes having a sense of a greater life-purpose or contributing to the greater good. This could be being a good friend or parent, walking a spiritual path, working for a political or social cause, or mentoring/ giving to others through volunteer efforts.



Column 10 is:

## **Fun, Play, Humor, Light-heartedness**

This includes lots of laughter, fun and pleasures. From enjoying a full moon, a hot fudge sundae or the Sunday comics to having fun with others playing games, seeing a movie, singing together, going to hear live music, and enjoying a good laugh together.

**2)** Now that you have your 10 named columns/bars, go back and reflect on the meaning of each column and give yourself a rating according to **HOW SATISFIED YOU ARE** with the column. If you are dissatisfied, you would give the column a 1,2, or 3. If you feel sort of satisfied, a 4,5 or 6 and if you are very satisfied, you would give yourself a 7, 8, 9 or 10 depending on how highly satisfied you are.

**For example, with Physical Care:** If you eat healthy and abstain from alcohol, take your meds and see your doctors for regular appointments and check ups, and care for your appearance, but you don't exercise, you may rate this column a 7. Put the number 7 under the column and then **SHADE IN** the column with a pencil up to the measurement of a 7.

Now, rate your level of satisfaction for each column/bar and shade the bar up to the number of the rating. You should end up with 10 columns/bars that are shaded in at different heights. This is a visual snapshot of your

**Life Balance.**

\*\*Life Balance Inventory is adapted from Pillars of a Balanced Life by Ben Dean, PhD, at Mentorcoach.com.

### **3) HOW DOES ONE MAKE A CHANGE IN LIFE BALANCE?**

**3 STEPS:**

1) As you look at your completed Life Balance Inventory, choose a column you would like to make a change or an improvement in during the next month?

2) **WHAT** would you like to do in the next month that would increase your satisfaction rating of that column .5? (i.e. increase from 4 to 4.5)

In this way, you are setting yourself up for success by choosing a small, doable step or action that you commit to and would raise your rating 1/2 a degree. You can choose to pick a new action each month that will raise the rating .5.

3) After you decide **WHAT** you will do, the next way to increase your chance

of success is to decide **WHEN and WHERE** you are going to take your step towards raising your score. Be specific. Write it in your calendar on a specific day and in a specific time frame. Research has shown that when

people decide "when and where," they will accomplish a task and then write it in their calendars, they are more likely to achieve their goal.

For example, you could decide to raise your **INNER ATTITUDE** rating by focusing on **GRATITUDE**. You could decide to keep a gratitude journal by your bedside and write in it 1 time a week on Sunday before sleep: write 3 things you feel grateful for that happened during the week.

4) You could also take the Life Balance Inventory and decide to pick a **THEME** for the year that you will work on. You would then pick a new action to take each month, totaling 12 actions during the year that increase your score in one or more columns.

For example: This year I picked 2 themes. **Healthy Eating and Community**.

I began my first action in January by creating a "Soup Club." I invited

3 other families to join and they all accepted the invite. Each family will make a soup once a month on a Sunday and the other 3 families will come with their container by 6pm on Sunday and pick up their portion of the soup

from the host home. Then a different family will make the soup the following

Sunday. . . and so on. It is already happening and it's been fun and very nurturing for us all.

**"Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together."**

**~ Vincent van Gogh**

5) Lastly, if you pick a theme for the year or pick a column you want to improve on your Life Balance Inventory, look around you. Observe how others are enacting your theme. Take inspiration from them.

You, too, can do it. Believe in yourself.

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