

“SURVIVING AND THRIVING”

“Surviving and Thriving”, the annual Unalaska Women’s Conference. This year’s theme is BALANCE – MIND/BODY/SPIRIT. I have been really thinking about the theme for this year’s Women’s Conference, and what that actually means in terms of a balanced lifestyle. Many people talk about being “barely able to keep my head above water”, in their daily lives. This is the survival mode. It is very difficult to keep getting up day-by-day and facing the same ole grind and knowing that tomorrow will be more of the same. So how do we move out of the mode of just surviving in our lives and on to the mode of thriving? How does one achieve a balanced lifestyle? What does it look like or how will I know when I have it? Since each of us is a unique human being balance will be somewhat different for each of us. We put different priorities on different things. There are certain areas however that encompass all our lives and we must each figure out the proportion or balance that is right for each of us. Think about the little mobiles that we frequently hang over a baby’s crib; think how each string hangs down in perfect balance even though they may be different lengths and the objects dangling from the strings may vary in size, shape and weight. Think about how the mobiles are all different, again size, shape, weight and materials used to make the mobile, yet, each one is in perfect balance, equilibrium – harmony.

A balanced lifestyle requires being aware of the important components in your life and what proportion of each in your life keeps you in balance or harmony. You will find that this will change over time with the varying circumstances of your life and lifestyle. This is neither bad nor good; it is simply real life circumstances and is regulated by the things that happen to us and by the choices and attitudes we make. I have identified some general areas that are common in the lives of all of us and I will invite you to take a look at these areas and ask yourself if the proportion of each in your life is what you want it to be? What you are comfortable with? And does it feel like you are in balance or harmony as a whole? These areas include: physical, emotional, intellectual, work, leisure/play and spiritual.

Let’s look at the physical component. This will include things like general physical health, physical fitness, exercise and diet. It is very difficult to maintain the energy level necessary for any life style if you are rundown physically or have serious physical medical problems that you do not address. You have heard about eating right and getting exercise until you are sick of it I am sure, but it is part of this balance and very important.

Then there is the emotional component. This might include your relationships with other people; yes, we do need others in our lives. Relationships will help us get the emotional “exercise” to help us stay emotionally healthy. Relationships do take work. Those of you who are married or in a committed relationship, the real work starts after you say, “I do”, and it does not end there! The first and most important relationship is actually with yourself! Take care of yourself and be your own best friend rather than always beating yourself up; this is crucial to have good mental/emotional health. If you are having emotional problems, whether caused by mood disorders or caused by life circumstances, address the problems just like you would a physical problem or illness.

The idea of “intellectual” being part of this balance may sound strange, but think about it. As human beings we need to have intellectual stimulation in our lives, whether it comes from education, reading, conversation with others or our own creative endeavors. This helps us stay interested in life and interesting as a human. We never outgrow our need to continue to learn and grow intellectually.

Work – no, not just another four letter word. Work is usually thought of as what you do to earn your living, but it is much more than that. For a child it may be school or education that is their “work”. Work is also associated with our purpose for being on this Earth, the place we fit to make our contribution. It is our career and the place we earn our paychecks, but more than that, it can be the things we do to make our homes more comfortable or beautiful, the helping hand we lend a sick neighbor or elder, or the efforts we make on behalf of the community or the children.

Since we know the old saying about all work and no play... Absolutely true. Part of balancing your life is leaving time to enjoy yourself, to relax; yes, to play. We all need to play, adults and kids alike. Take time out to listen to the birds or the waves, smell the roses or laugh at a joke. The secret here is that the laughter helps lessen the stress in our lives and helps us keep things in perspective. It is not just for vacations, it is for everyday as well.

Spirituality is about the beliefs and ideas that give your life meaning; about your philosophy of life. It is a big part of the balance, perhaps the glue that holds it all together. For some people this is found in a religious belief, for some it is found in their relationship to others, for some it is found in the act of creating music, art, literature, etc., and for some people it is found in a connection with nature, with the land or the world around them.

If you put all these things together, you will find many of them overlap – physical exercise and play may mean participating in sports, physical exercise and spirituality may mean hiking and enjoying nature. Good nutrition and emotional health may mean having a meal with a friend or family. Work/intellectual/spiritual may all combine in your chosen career. I think you get the idea, we are the sum of our parts and our balance or harmony in life and living depends on how we integrate those parts into the whole.

Here is my challenge – evaluate your life in these areas and ask if they are balanced to your satisfaction. If not, what do you need to change? How can you change it? When can you start?

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