

Dad always thought laughter was the best medicine, which I guess is why several of us died of tuberculosis.

Jack Handey

the columnist

KIRAN BEDI



The rat race story



As we toil with the intention of not lagging behind in the race for success, we forget about priorities that deserve an equal concern but are mostly ignored.

I was invited this week to speak on the work-life balance to a group of business professionals. The issue is very relevant today considering the way business executives are jet setting almost non-stop in their urge (read race) to achieve more. A belief prevails that if we do not maintain acceleration, others will overtake us. Which necessarily does not mean that we will lose out, but the fear that we may slip behind is the anxiety.

In other words, all of us with such a belief are always running a race! Therefore work consumes us all the time. And it has its costs. A day has only 24 hours. Waking-work hours have an endurance limit. But can a person give to work the time that must be spent with somebody else? That time is that of the family, i.e. spouse, parents, children and dependents. It is also at the cost of personal relationships, personal needs and most of all personal health.

Priority lost

There is such growing pressure to do more and more on time that priority of work takes it all. All other important personal matters wait till they have become emergencies. A conflict follows between competing urgent/emergency issues with no time and energy left even for other equally important issues.

I wondered what is that restores work life balance. Who is the real controller? And who is the real restorer of the balance? My mind started to work overtime as I drove to

the place of my presentation. Fortunately, the place was about 50 minutes away. I got some time to think and reflect.

I am presenting the questions in the form of clues which came to my mind. These I thought were some of the keys responsible for opening the locks within us.

Pinpointing queries

Some of the questions which my mind started to ask were —

1. What do you want most in life?
2. What do you want to be?
3. What can you not do without?
4. What is of value to you?
5. What is your nature?
6. How important is family to you?
7. How important is work to you?
8. How important is home to you?
9. How important is caring and concern to you?
10. How understanding are you?
11. Do you have reading habits?
12. Do you have spiritual habits?
13. Do you have fitness habits?
14. Are you a sensitive person by nature?
15. Do you value personal reflection?
16. Do you regret?
17. What is your satisfaction level?
18. What is your sense of overall responsibility?

It is evident from this list how much I was being mentally bombarded with questions to provide me the possible clues to the issue I was working on within me, on my way to the ad-

dress the subject.

Truthfully, I placed these questions to the audience. And it seemed to drive home the point. Since answer to one question led to clarification for the other.

Revelations

If work alone is most important then all other priorities will take a back seat. If family alone is most important then work will take a back seat. Mature living will strike a balance and go by the urgencies and not by factors dictated by others.

If fitness is important then late nights will be avoided as a habit. If one is considerate one will pay good attention to one's spouse and family and respect their support. A husband will not let his wife wait endlessly for food while he or his friends continue to nurse their drinks. These are just small examples, but have wider implications.

However employers have a very important role. Their levels of sensitivity matter. If they are spending extra time in the office themselves, it is not necessary that they force it on their juniors too. If they do not take leave it is not necessary they deny it to others.

The more we think and reflect on the questions asked the more we will become sensitive to the issue of balance in ones work life. And in this we all have a role to play, personally and for others.

We just need to be aware that despite winning a rat race still leaves you to be a rat.