

Trucking should be all about a work-life balance... right?



TruckSure
By Trevor Toohill

Running a transport business is stressful because it's hard to take time off or to relax. But your business will run more smoothly if you manage to get a good work-life balance.

All work and no play is bad for business

Truckies tend to be workaholics. They believe that working hard is the path to success. And so it is – up to a point.

Unfortunately, too much hard work can kill you – literally. Excessive stress can lead to a lack of fitness, high blood pressure, heart problems, and other health issues. But pushing yourself and your drivers too hard is not only dangerous and unhealthy, it's also an inefficient way to run a business. It stifles creativity and kills motivation. A good work-life balance is essential for a successful result.

Here are a couple of ideas on how you can balance your life and run your business which will help you and your drivers get the best of both worlds.

Take a scientific approach

Business psychology has taught us a lot about how our brains work.

Don't force creativity

The creative part of the human brain often kicks into action when our attention is elsewhere – especially when we're relaxed. That's why good ideas often 'pop into our minds' overnight or in the shower. The best way to solve a problem creatively is to concentrate on it for a while, then forget about it and relax.

Early riser or night owl?

Some people work better in the morning, others in the evening. There's little you can do to change this – but you can adapt to it. Ask yourself which type of person you are, and save the challenges for the time of day when you're at your mental peak. A bit of a challenge for drivers on shift hours, but a lot of thinking time is available when you are behind the wheel.

Stress is good – in moderation

There's evidence that stress in moderation may help our bodies stay in peak condition. However, long-term stress is bad for us, weakening our immune systems and prematurely ageing our bodies. If you're permanently stressed by your work, the cortisol and adrenaline in your bloodstream are damaging your health. It's time to ease off.

Find the right work pattern

Hard work is unavoidable if you want your business to succeed. But that doesn't mean you have to work hard all the time.

There will be times when your business needs you to put in extra hours of solid effort. Keep track of such times and try to compensate for them later. After a few weeks of hard, intense work, you might take a long weekend away to recharge your body and mind.

Think of your work pattern as being like a bank. You 'deposit' relaxation time so that you can 'spend' with hard work when you have to.

Five practical tips for balancing work with life

It's one thing to have good intentions about your work-life balance, but quite another to carry them out. Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. Learn to delegate

The most successful owner operators are those who can delegate the right work to the right people – and then let them get on with it. If you're a micromanager or someone who finds it hard to delegate work, time to change.

2. Take all your holidays

And encourage your drivers to do the same. Without a holiday, life can start to feel like being on a treadmill. That's no way to run a business. Take breaks when you can, and make the most of your time away from work.

3. Get regular medical check-ups

The warning signs of overwork will be clear for everyone to see – except you. Transporters tend to be blind to their own symptoms of stress because they're so wrapped up in their work. So get regular check-ups. Simple tests will indicate whether you need to reduce your workload.

4. Stay healthy

Eat sensibly, avoid stimulants, exercise regularly, restrict alcohol, give up the smokes and get plenty of the right sleep. Keeping your body healthy will help your mind cope with the pressures of running your business.

5. Switch off

Learn how to switch off properly at the end of the day and at weekends too. Resist the urge to check your business email or log into your systems out of hours. Relax and switch out of work mode entirely. Polishing the chrome is a great relaxer!

Remember why you're in business

Think back to when you purchased your first truck, and ask yourself why you did it. Perhaps it was so you could have more independence, more money, greater challenge, or extra free time to spend with your family. Maybe it was all of those things.

Keep your goals in mind at all times, write them down and have them in a place where you can easily see and refer to them. This will make it easier to avoid work becoming an end in itself. It's important to keep a sense of perspective. "Nobody died wishing they'd spent more time at work".

Your work-life balance affects how successful you'll be at running your business. Slaving away all the time will have a negative effect on both your business and your personal life. If you take the time to get the balance right, you'll have a successful business – and the health and freedom to enjoy it.

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