



# the Leadership LENS

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*a monthly resource providing insight, opinion & practical information on life balance, creativity & perspective*

## A Better Work Life Balance for Executives - part 1

It was getting near five o'clock in the afternoon and some of the heat from the midday sun remained. I debated starting another project so late in the day, but I wanted to make good on my intention. It's been my intention to divide my workday into two, three-hour chunks of highly intensive effort followed by me-time and time for my family. I even had to consciously force myself away from checking e-mail one more time, so as to be more authentic in my value of life balance. I shut down my computer and rounded up my son. Based on previous experience, it was going to take me 15-20 minutes to coax him into the Co-Pilot bicycle seat for my workout to Georgetown and back. He started off tickling me and talking about his day. Just as we rounded the bend on the Capital Crescent Trail indicating that we were passing from Montgomery County Maryland into the District of Columbia, something flew into my right eye. It was as if I had been knocked in the head by a tree limb!

I tried my best to massage this foreign body out of my eye, but the harder I tried, the more stuck it became. I imagined some strange insect trying to dig its way into my cornea and began to panic. I took many deep breaths and tried to bike with only my left eye open swerving every few feet. This seemed to make everyone around me nervous. With only my left eye open, it felt as if I was nearly asleep. It was surreal. This struggle with the eye invader happened while my mountain bike was going about 15 mph. In between renewed attempts to clean my eye out with water from my water bottle, my son continued to ask me the proverbial 'why' questions. He wanted to know why he couldn't see the 'boo boo' in Daddy's eye and why I couldn't go faster. Finally I made it to the National Park Service public restroom, panting. I spent over ten minutes trying to rinse, shake and beg whatever was stuck in my eye to come out. The only thing that happened was my son fell asleep. I was determined to finish my workout instead of limp home, so I gritted my teeth and 'toughed it out' by swerving all the way



*Along the Capital Crescent Trail, Washington, DC, (c) Mark Sincevich*

down the trail. I stopped again at the same restroom on the way back and still could not dislodge my opponent.

Two hours later after an extended shower, a botched attempt at calming myself through a relaxation CD, and multiple dunks under running cold water, I was ready to give up and have my wife drive me to the emergency clinic. Since I wasn't dying, just half-crazed with massive discomfort, I began to mentally prepare myself for the many hours-long wait at the clinic. At this point I remembered something. In between gritting my teeth and holding back obscenities, I managed to convince my wife to bring me a toothpick. She probably thought I was going to try and jab my eye in frustration. I promised I wasn't going to give her a macabre replacement for the olive in a martini. Instead, I wanted her to roll my eyelid back on the toothpick. She got the hang of it after a few attempts and said, "Now we're making progress." She saw the irritant, the source of my evening's discontent and ran upstairs to collect a cotton swab. With the finesse of Clara Barton, she removed a black speck the size of a grain of sand that was stuck to my upper inner eyelid. What affected me was so small, and yes it brought me to my knees.

### Pay Attention to the Small Things

I'm still in awe that a black speck the size of a grain of sand could literally incapacitate me for a few hours. Yet isn't this what happens when we don't pay attention to our health, our employees and our organizations? The black speck is a perfect metaphor to what happens when employees aren't encouraged by management to take care of themselves, take proper vacations, and to practice an effective work life balance. When we work too hard and too long, once seemingly small inconveniences become big

and foreboding. Not taking time for healthy meals eventually becomes a heart attack waiting to happen. The employee who wanted to take two weeks off on her vacation after your repeated 'next times' becomes one of the first out of the door to a competitor.

According to Laurie Bienstock, a compensation analyst at Watson Wyatt Worldwide, "The typical costs of turnover per employee – without even realizing you have lost productivity and intellectual property – can run one to two times employee salary." Each year, Watson Wyatt publishes a report called, "The Strategic Rewards Study," which examines U.S. organizations with 1,000 employees or more. In 2006 it looked at top performers in 262 companies. It found that of those who reported having work/life balance, 45% considered themselves highly committed employees. Interestingly enough, not one employee who didn't have an effective work life balance was committed to the organization! Clearly there is a connection between having more committed employees and having an effective work life balance.

In order to prevent a potential premature birth of her second child, then 39-year old Tami Booth Corwin, the President of Rodale Books, quit her post to become a full-time stay at home mom. She wanted to make sure that she enjoyed her family time more and this included not having to commute 90 minutes each way from her home in Bucks County, PA to Manhattan. She is best known for acquiring the 2001 South Beach Diet book that today has sold 11 Million copies. While executives don't necessarily have to leave the company in order to practice an effective work life balance, they do set the pace of the organization when it comes to how life balance is viewed. I remember working at Silicon Graphics, a computer company, in the late 1990's. The head of the government division,

Anthony Robbins (no relation to professional speaker Tony Robbins), always said, "The pace of the organization is set by the lead dog."



*Mark Sincevich works with individuals and organizations to increase their communication power so they gain a fresh perspective, generate new ideas, sharpen the focus and create more business. He uses a unique photography angle in his creative keynotes, meeting facilitation and powerful presentation skills programs. Mark is the Founder and Chief Perspective Officer of Staash Press, a member of the National Speakers Association and the Executive Director of the Digital Photography Institute. He is also the creator of the Staash Perspective System (SPS). The SPS takes its inspiration from photography and teaches that simplicity leads to more powerful communication. In between assignments, Mark can be found spending time with his family or writing in cafés with character. He can be contacted at 301-654-3010 or [www.staashpress.com](http://www.staashpress.com).*