

life lines

information for your life

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BE YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF AT WORK

PG: 2

ACHIEVE A BETTER BALANCE IN YOUR LIFE

PG: 5

COPING WITH FINANCIAL STRESS

PG: 7

HOW FRIENDSHIPS IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

PG: 10



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BE YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF AT WORK

It might mean being more open about your cultural, racial, or gender identity or about your most important personal values.

Do you feel like you're a different person at work than you are at home or with friends? What if you could speak and act more naturally at work and be respected and valued for who you are? That may not be possible in every organization, but if you try being more authentic at work, you might find that you improve your relationships with colleagues, feel more engaged, and contribute more fully and creatively to your organization.

What does it mean to be your authentic self at work?

Being authentic at work involves voicing your thoughts and ideas without holding back out of fear of criticism. It means sharing—in appropriate ways and appropriate situations—who you are, what motivates you, and what's important to you. It might mean being honest about priorities outside of work, such as care responsibilities for your children or aging parents. It might mean being more open about your cultural, racial, or gender identity or about your most important personal values.

Being authentic at work is about establishing more honest and meaningful relationships with work colleagues. It is not about sharing every detail of your life. Nor is it about breaking rules and conventions that enable effective collaboration, civil conversations, and productive disagreements. To be authentic at work, you need to respect and accept the authenticity of others.

Why It Can Be Hard to Be Authentic at Work

In some organizations, people are judged on their ability to fit in, even when that involves hiding their true identities and keeping their thoughts and ideas to themselves. In these organizations, conformity and group harmony can be seen as more important than growth, learning, and the full engagement of all employees.

The desire to fit in is also a natural human tendency, even when there's no explicit pressure to conform. Hiding your true identity, also known

Continued on Page 3



BE YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF AT WORK

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as *masking* or *covering*, can seem like the safest option if you are different in some way—perhaps because of your background, race, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual preferences, or a cognitive difference such as ADHD or autism. Fear—of judgment, rejection, or losing a job—can keep people from being their true selves at work.

Sometimes this fear is justified. In an organization that doesn't value diversity and the open sharing of ideas, where disagreeing with the boss's view is seen as a threat, it may not be safe to be your authentic self. But often the masking and covering is self-imposed and self-limiting. Taking steps toward being more honest and open can be liberating for you and beneficial to your team and organization.

How to Be Your Authentic Self at Work

- **Take stock of who you are and how you present at work.** Step back and think about who you are, where you've come from, and what's important to you. Consider whether you act and speak differently at work than you do with your family and friends. If you do, in what ways are you different? When do those differences come out—in what situations and with which people? What's driving you to hide your true self?
 - To get a better sense of this, you might keep a journal to note examples of when you're not your authentic self at work. That can help you spot patterns in your own behavior, the effect your work environment has on you, and your fears and motivations.
- **Look for role models and encouragement.** Are there people in your organization who are similar to you and appear to be operating successfully without hiding behind a mask? How are they doing it? Might any of them be willing to talk with you and share their experiences? If you don't see that in your organization, look elsewhere. Connect with others through

Continued on Page 4



BE YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF AT WORK

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online or local affinity groups. Find people who will encourage and guide you as you take steps to be truer to yourself.

- **Listen to and connect with people.** Engage in deeper conversations with colleagues beyond work tasks. Share a break or have lunch with someone, and ask them about their life outside of work or what they find most challenging or fulfilling in their work. Listen actively. Building these connections helps you both to learn about each other and become more comfortable being your true selves while working together. You'll also discover who your "safe people" are—the ones you can trust and with whom you can be your true self at work.
- **Allow yourself to be vulnerable.** Be as honest about what you don't know as you are about what you do. Have the courage to speak up with a different opinion. Share a bit more of who you are as you get to know your work colleagues. Opening up—appropriately and in appropriate situations—will also help others share more about themselves. While it can be scary to do this, you'll likely find that others will respect and value you for bringing your

unique perspectives to the team, and that work relationships will become more meaningful and more enjoyable.

- **Take care of yourself.** Hiding your true self at work takes energy, and the shift to being more authentic can be stressful at first. Relax and recharge by spending time with people who know you, understand you, and care about you. Take breaks from work to relieve stress, whether it's a short walk outside or a few minutes of deep breathing or mindful meditation. As you become more comfortable being yourself at work, and

Morgan, H. (2024, December 10). *How to be your authentic self at work* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

ACHIEVE A BETTER BALANCE IN YOUR LIFE



Don't make plans for every evening or weekend, and find some ways to distance yourself from the things that are causing you the most stress.

It can be hard to find a comfortable balance in life between work and family responsibilities and personal priorities. Even when you feel that you've found that balance, changes, both large and small, can throw it off. A new baby, an older relative who needs help, changes in your child's school schedule, or new responsibilities at work can make life feel overwhelming. The solution is usually to step back, consider what's most important, and figure out where adjustments can be made in your routine. Here are some ideas for regaining balance and restoring a sense of control in your life.

Slow down.

Life is simply too short, so don't let things pass by you in a blur. Make room in your schedule and allow yourself to enjoy the things and people around you. Don't make plans for every evening or weekend, and find some ways to distance yourself from the things that are causing you the most stress.

Learn to manage your time.

Avoid procrastination. For many people, most of the stress they feel comes from simply being disorganized and putting things off. Learn to set more realistic goals and deadlines, and then stick to them. You'll find that not only are you less stressed, but your work will be better.

Continued on Page 6

ACHIEVE A BETTER BALANCE IN YOUR LIFE



Share the load.

Even though you may sometimes feel you are the only one capable of doing something, it's usually not the case. Get your partner or other family members to help you with personal and family responsibilities. Taking care of the household, children, or parents should not be the responsibility of just one person. Consider whether work tasks might be shared differently, too—by more effective delegation or more efficient teamwork, for example.

Let things go (don't sweat the small stuff).

It's simpler said than done, but learn to let things go once in a while. So what if the dishes don't get washed every day, or the house doesn't get vacuumed every week? Learn to recognize the things that aren't truly important, and allow yourself to let them go—and then don't beat yourself up for not being superhuman.

Explore your options.

If you are feeling overwhelmed with your family responsibilities, get help if you can afford it, or enlist family members and friends for some tasks. Find a sitter for your children, explore options for aging

parents, and seek counseling for yourself. In many cases, you have options, but you need to take the time to find them.

Talk to your employer.

Explore ways to modify your work schedule or change your work responsibilities, whether to get through a temporary crisis at home or as a permanent shift. Depending on your job and your financial situation, these might include flexible work hours, work from home, part-time work, or a temporary adjustment in your job duties.

Take charge.

Sometimes it's easier for you to allow yourself to feel overwhelmed rather than to take charge and develop a prioritized list of things that need to get done. You need to buck that trend. Develop a list. Set priorities. Then enjoy the satisfaction of crossing things off your list.

Simplify.

It seems human nature for just about everyone to take on too many tasks and responsibilities, to try to do too much, and to own too much. Find a way to simplify your life. Change your lifestyle. Learn to say *no* and to ask for help. Get rid of the clutter and baggage in your house and your life.

In the end, the key word is *balance*. You need to find the balance that works for you. Celebrate your successes, and don't dwell on your failures. Life is a process, and so is striving for balance in your life.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2025). *Achieve a better balance in your life* (H. Morgan). Raleigh, NC: Author.



COPING WITH FINANCIAL STRESS

Money worries are one of the most common causes of stress. Unexpected expenses, price increases, income loss, and high levels of debt can cause pressure that may feel all-consuming. When money runs short, it doesn't simply create financial hardship. It can lead to feelings of shame, anger, fear, and depression. Those negative emotions can get in the way of the clear thinking you need to deal with your financial challenges. Here are some suggestions for coping with financial stress and navigating a path toward better financial and emotional wellbeing.

Focus on what you can control.

Don't panic about things that are beyond your control. You can't change the economy to bring prices down or create more and better-paying jobs. You can control how you spend your money and how you manage your debt and savings. There may be ways you can earn more money. By acting on things you can control, you'll begin to feel more in control of your life, and feeling more in control can help you stay calm and make good decisions.

Understand your financial situation.

When you're worried about money, it can be tempting to avoid thinking about it. However, avoiding financial challenges won't resolve them. Turn *toward* your money worries instead of away from them. Take the time to understand your finances as they really are.

Add up how much money you earn every month, and compare that to what you spend. Make a chart breaking your expenses down into categories. A budgeting worksheet or an app can help as you build this picture of how your money comes in and flows

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out. By gathering this information in one place, you can see how your income and expenses match up (or don't). Seeing the totals by category can help you understand where you might need to make adjustments. While it can be scary to start this process, having the information is empowering and sometimes even comforting.

Talk as a couple and as a family.

If you're facing money challenges, your partner and other members of your household are also affected. Once you understand your financial situation, talk about it in calm, respectful, and mutually supportive ways. Recognize that others may be scared about what might happen in the future. They may have

Continued on Page 8



COPING WITH FINANCIAL STRESS

different ideas about what to change to bring household finances into balance. By talking, you can agree on a plan, then follow that plan together.

Prioritize changes, and make them one step at a time.

Financial stress can feel overwhelming. You can make it feel more manageable by choosing a few changes and making them one step at a time. As you experience small successes, you'll gain the confidence and courage to make bigger and more difficult changes. (If you're facing a financial crisis, you may need to make significant changes quickly. Consider talking with a professional advisor right away.)

To correct a budget that is out of balance, you can either increase your income or cut your spending—or both:

- **Consider options to increase your income.** These might include working extra shifts at your job, applying for a promotion, asking for a raise, taking a second job, earning money from an outside activity, renting a room in your home, or exploring options for government support.
- **Think about ways you might cut expenses.** These might include conserving energy to reduce heating and A/C bills, carpooling or working from home more often, switching to less-expensive phone and internet plans, shopping from a carefully planned grocery list and using coupons, exploring less-expensive housing options, paying down high-interest debt, ending subscriptions you rarely use, eating out less often, or cutting back on concerts and other entertainment.

- **Leave room for fun and pleasure in your life.** Many activities that bring joy don't cost money. Spending time in nature, playing games, and many forms of exercise are free. Even extras that cost money are worth keeping if they help you stay calm and clear-headed. If your yoga class helps you relax or an occasional latte gives you a lift, don't punish yourself by eliminating those expenses.

Practice stress management.

Making progress in resolving your money challenges will help you feel more in control of your life, but the changes can take time. To keep your stress under control while you work on your finances, take care of yourself, and use stress-management techniques that work for you:

- **Talk to trusted friends.** It can be hard to talk about money and embarrassing, at first, to admit to having money problems. But opening up to supportive friends can help you put your worries in perspective and feel calmer. You don't need them to fix your problems, just to be a friend and help you feel better about yourself.

Continued on Page 9



COPING WITH FINANCIAL STRESS

- **Focus on the positive.** Think about the progress you're making, rather than how far you have yet to go. Think of what you're grateful for in life, rather than what makes you unhappy. Look for the positive opportunities in the changes you're making.
- **Exercise.** Physical activity is important to good health. It's also calming when you're feeling tense. You don't need to pay for a gym to exercise. Go for walks, ride your bike, or find exercise stations in public parks.
- **Eat healthy foods, and get the sleep you need.** Nutritious meals and regular sleep will help you feel better, maintain your energy, and think clearly.
- **Practice a relaxation technique.** Try deep breathing, mindfulness, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, listening to calming music, or

spending time in nature. Find an activity or a technique that works to relax your mind and body when you're feeling anxious.

Ask for professional help.

Credit counseling and financial planning services offer expert guidance on money matters. Mental health counselors can help you deal with stress and change behaviors that may be contributing to your money worries. Your employee wellbeing program can provide stress management counseling and referrals to financial and mental health professionals.

Morgan, H. (Revised 2025 [Ed.]). Coping with financial stress (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).



HOW FRIENDSHIPS IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

Friendships are the social connections that enrich your life with conversation, comfort, laughter, support, and encouragement. While friendships can also come with disappointment and conflict, good ones help to buffer the effects of setbacks and stress and help you navigate life's challenges.

Some friendships seem to endure with ease. Some fall away as circumstances change—as people move, change jobs, start families, divorce, or shift priorities. Most take some effort to maintain. Making new friends, especially as an adult, can be difficult; however, maintaining good friendships and making new ones is worth the effort—for your quality of life, happiness, and health.

How do friendships and social connections improve your life?

Many of the benefits of friendships and supportive social connections are obvious. They make you feel good and help you through life's ups and downs. Other benefits, especially the powerful effect of social connections on people's physical health, have been discovered through research. Below are some of the ways friendships help to improve your quality of life.

Life Satisfaction and Enjoyment

- Friendships fill a basic human need for company and companionship—for a sense of belonging. Friends are people who talk with one another, share thoughts and experiences, and have meals or coffee together. Without these social connections, people are susceptible to feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- Good friends make you happier. Friends who listen to, validate the feelings of, and enjoy each other's company are happier. That's true when they are together, but it also carries over as an emotional lift and buffer when they are apart.
- Friendships improve your self-confidence and sense of self-worth. Having friends who appreciate you for who you are and offer praise and reassurance when you're feeling unsure of yourself, strengthens your self-esteem and confidence. Friends like these help you value yourself as a unique individual and remind you how much you have to offer.

Support and Resilience

- Friends offer emotional support. They listen, show empathy, and tell you they care. This is especially important when you are feeling down or lonely.

Continued on Page 11



HOW FRIENDSHIPS IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

- Friends challenge negative thinking with different perspectives. They can help you see things from different angles and steer you away from unrealistic and unhelpful patterns of thought.
- Friends provide guidance and help you make decisions in ways that are true to your best self.
- Friends help you cope with tough times—with loss, illness, and hardship. They strengthen your resilience, helping you weather the inevitable down times in life and bounce back.
- Good friends push you to be your best. They encourage you, challenge you, and remind you of your strengths.
- Friends give you the opportunity to help and be compassionate. Caring about other people and demonstrating that care not only helps your friends, it helps you. It contributes to your emotional strength and resilience and helps you keep your own worries in perspective.

Help and Information

- Friends provide practical help. That might include help with a move, backup child care, or a home-cooked meal when you're sick or overwhelmed.
- Friends share information. They alert you to job and learning opportunities, share tips from their own experience, and help you navigate new challenges.

Physical and Mental Health

- People with supportive social networks have less stress. That may be because they don't feel lonely as often or because of the calming, reassuring influence friends have.
- Friends encourage healthy behavior. If you have friends who have healthy eating, exercise, and spending habits, you're more likely to adopt those habits as well. It can work the other way, too, though. If you're trying to lose weight, quit smoking, or address a drinking problem, you'll have a better chance of success if you spend time with people who share those goals.
- Having friends can reduce your risk of depression. Several studies have found that the strength of friendships and social networks is linked to lower incidence of depressive symptoms.
- Supportive social connections can improve heart health. People with strong social connections are significantly less likely to experience heart attacks or die from heart disease, according to separate, long-term studies. One reason may be the association of friendships and social support with lower levels of stress.
- The strength of a person's social networks has been linked with other positive health outcomes, too. These include reduced risks of diabetes, high blood pressure, and stroke. It can also lead to a longer life. Having friends and a strong social support network has been found to be as powerful an influence on longevity as exercise and not smoking.

Morgan, H. (Revised 2024). *How friendships improve your life* (B. Schuette & Z. Meeker, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.