

# DOING TIME

Juggling work with your home life is never easy in a stressful industry. **ALEX JAMES** explains why it's vital to set aside some time for yourself

A friend said this .... 'I'm hoping to spend some time with the kids this weekend – we have a lot to do but hopefully we'll squeeze in a bit of quality family time'. I thought how familiar this statement is and how, a few years ago, I might have said the same thing. Nowadays however it's a case of when can I see my children? They have such busy lives. I have huge regrets nowadays about being too busy with every day stuff to be around those that actually were, and of course still are, my life.

The true value of time is often only really recognised when it is limited. The saying is true, isn't it? At the end of our lives it's unlikely any of us will be saying I wish I'd spent more time at work or doing stuff around the house. Having worked for years with the dying and with the bereaved I have learned the most precious commodity any of us have is our time. How we apportion it is actually our choice. In this month's contribution I want to encourage you to think about time – your time and ask yourself the following questions.

*Is my life in balance?*

*Do I apportion my time in the way I would like?*

*Do I feel guilty if I take time out for myself?*

It's only when we stop and think about it that we realise that there is never going to be enough time. What we all need to do is learn how to best spend what we do have, get balance into our lives and put ourselves and those we love high onto our list of priorities. When we take care of ourselves we

are more able to perform our everyday tasks and take care of others. Moving away from our desks, PCs, mobile phones and simply taking a little space for one's self in a day can be rejuvenating. Spending time enjoying ourselves on our own and with our loved ones is hugely beneficial in many ways. Not least to our physical and mental wellbeing.

Working in the funeral, death or dying industry is a particularly stressful occupation. Not only are there the everyday stresses of the work environment but of emotional impact and transference. Although we do to some extent become desensitised to our working environment the impact on us of the circumstances and emotions of others cannot be underestimated. Taking time away from the working environment is therefore a very necessary practise, of course not so easily achieved if you reside near or at your place of work. Then there's the guilt and stress when you do take time, isn't there? It's not easy making the adjustment and convincing yourself that less time working and more time doing things you enjoy is the healthy option, but if you think about it, what I'm saying here is good sense. It's really all about planning; delegation and recognising that actually turning off the mobile phone and taking a walk won't really impact your work load that dramatically but could improve your personal life in a positive way. When I first started writing these articles I spoke about the amount of stress funeral directors were experiencing.

I received quite a few emails saying similar things; I drink too much, my marriage is suffering, I am always working, I think I have burn out, I don't feel in control. These are common problems amongst all of those providing public services within emotionally charged environments.

So here are a few tips on how you can manage your time:

- Take your diary and block out some spaces for someone very important ... YOU!
- Set aside time to be with family, friends and for hobbies, no matter how limited, quality is better than quantity. Let being with them be the focus, so turn off external communications, yes, that means mobile phones. Years ago no one had this personal technology, only a few had phones at home and most communications were via public phone booths but we survived.
- Have at least some allotted time each day on your own to simply be. No distractions just a space to think. There's a lot to be said for meditation, mindfulness, simple breathing exercises (especially before sleep).
- Rest, laugh and humour is especially important. Play, live your life and at the end of each day think about how you have spent the day and how you might be able to spend tomorrow with a little less time doing the things you dislike and more doing the things you enjoy. It really is a case of taking time to look at just how you are spending your time and doing the maths. Are you working to live or living to work?

Alex James MBACP is a professional bereavement counsellor/consultant, agony aunt and author who has worked with bereaved individuals and families for many years. Visit [www.bereavement.co.uk](http://www.bereavement.co.uk) to find out more.