

# Plenary Speech and Regular Session: Self-Care and Work-Life Balance: Let's Do It!

## PLENARY SPEAKER:

### **Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk**

Vice President for Health Promotion  
University Chief Wellness Officer  
Dean and Professor  
College of Nursing  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, Ohio

## MODERATORS:

### **Megan Amaya**

Assistant Professor of Clinical Nursing  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, Ohio

### **Shari Leventhal**

Executive Editor  
American Society of Nephrology  
Derwood, Maryland

## SPEAKERS:

### **Anna Jester**

Director of Sales & Marketing  
eJournalPress  
Rockville, Maryland

### **Emilie Gunn**

Managing Editor  
ASCO  
Alexandria, Virginia

### **Amy McPherson**

Director of Publications  
Botanical Society of America  
Saint Louis, Missouri

### **Jonathan Schultz**

Director, Journal Operations  
American Heart Association  
Baltimore, Maryland

## REPORTER:

### **Kristen E. Anderson**

Senior Managing Editor  
Allen Press, Inc.  
Lawrence, Kansas

- Physical activity: 30 minutes, 5 d/wk
- Healthy eating: 5 fruits and veggies per day
- No smoking
- Alcohol in moderation (single serving): 1 drink per day for women, 2 per day for men
- 7 hours of sleep
- Regularly engaging in stress reduction.

Maybe physical activity can start out at 15 minutes a day, but ideally see how much time can be added. She reminded attendees to “Beware of the Chair,” and that if one sits for 3 hours a day, the risk for heart disease can increase by 30%. Listeners also took note of her provided 3 Ps for happiness—pleasure, purpose, and pride:

- Enhance pleasure: look for ways to add fun and joy to your daily routines;
- Enhance purpose: increase opportunities to use your strengths to achieve meaningful goals;
- Enhance pride: look for ways to align your job with your passions; reflect upon your accomplishments (none are too small).

If one has ever sat in a 2-day stretch of meetings, or felt overworked, or felt like that mental, 10-minute break escaped with the next set of e-mails that rolled in, this annual meeting’s plenary speech and work-life balance and yoga sessions provided some insight into how to tackle self-care and how to reach that goal of work-life balance.

Day 2 of the meeting started with a yoga workout that got attendees up “bright” (well, we were almost awake) and early to stretch out limbs, find focal points, balance, and increase depth of breath. The session was a great kick-off to Bernadette Melnyk’s talk on “The Importance of Self-Care and Work/Life Balance for Optimal Well-being and High Performance: Strategies that Work!” She immediately drew folks in with her high energy and her passion for wellness (we were ALL awake then!). Melnyk gave attendees insight into an evidence-based recipe for preventing chronic disease because 80% of it is preventable with just a few healthy lifestyle behaviors, and encouraged tackling them one item at a time:

She also encouraged attendees to stay aligned with their dreams and passions, saying “What will you do if you know you cannot fail in the next 3 to 5 years?”; and not just to *think* it through, but physically write it down. She emphasized that physically writing it down can make a larger benefit in one’s life. Melnyk had a strong emphasis on the positive perspective, and not the negative. She said, “Catch your automatic negative thoughts. When you notice your mood has changed or you feel stressed, ask yourself, ‘What was just going through my mind?’” Turn those negative thoughts into positive to feel emotionally better.

As with any adjustment, or new idea, it does take practice. Behavior change does not happen overnight. She realized this for viewers as well as for herself. One of her more powerful clips compared one physically ill person with one physically capable person: Will workers be in a hospital bed in the years to come or will workers start the healthy lifestyle trend today, in hopes of avoiding bed confinement and chronic disease as they age?

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Those struggling to balance it all could definitely take at least one key point away, in hopes of applying it somewhere. So many want to get it "right," which was a wonderful tie-in to the session, "Work-Life Balance: Striking it Right."

Anna Jester provided her useful "gameboard of life" (Figure) as a reflection of her year and what she aims to do each year:

- At the beginning of the year, be an idealist and set goals. It is a good time to assess the more than 40-hour week. What is this good for?
- Be sure two vacations are set: one mid-way through the first half of the year, then another in the fall. Those vacations should be e-mail breaks as well! Step away from the phone and computer and soak up the vacation experience.

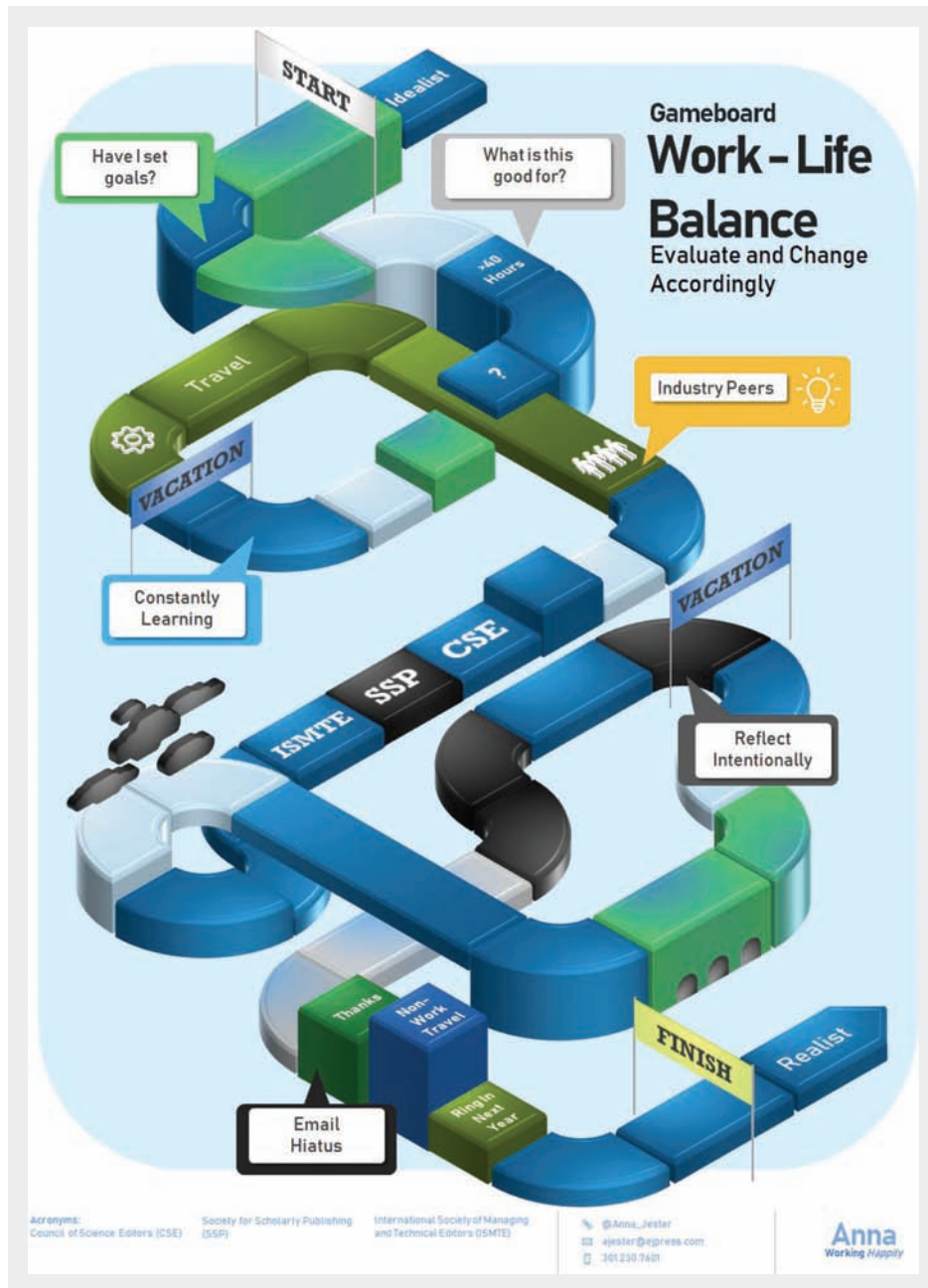


Figure. Anna Jester presented a work-life balance example of her typical year. It outlines the idealist start to its realist end.

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- Look for learning opportunities and initiatives.
- Meetings such as CSE, Society for Scholarly Publishing, and International Society of Managing and Technical Editors tend to lump pretty close together, so take an educational opportunity there if funds and time permit.
- Be sure one is reflecting where possible. And be intentional with it. A good time may be around the Thanksgiving season.
- The finish line (end of the year) will be approaching, so one may end up a realist, but see where life and work went, and get excited for the year to come.

She mentioned that it is ok not to reach all the goals—no one is perfect. And the process is definitely continual; if the above pointers do not happen in the order shown in the Figure, that is OK too—hitting the reset button, at any time along the way, is acceptable.

Another perspective was offered by Emilie Gunn, whose workplace has implemented a “Results Only Work Environment” (or “ROWE”), adapted from the book *Why Work Sucks and How to Fix It*.<sup>1</sup> The staff can work where they want and when they want, as long as the work is completed. Additionally, employees are free to take as much time off as they need, and office meetings are kept to a minimum. If meetings are needed, there must be a clear purpose and an agenda. In order to accommodate this atmosphere, Gunn offered the following points that are a “must”:

- Cross-train between employees
- Share resources, especially communal files
- Use clear communication: share calendars, use IM/text, and follow a set format for email subject lines (e.g., “RR 6/1/2019: Society is looking for financial aid”: RR = response requested, the date by which a reply is needed, and the descriptor of the e-mail)
- Use available technology, such as forwarding phones and WebEx
- Accept responsibility for the outcome of the work
- Prioritize tasks
- Outsource where possible
- Think creatively about how time is spent
- Use the “yes” reply carefully

She mentioned many find it hard to say “no,” but it can feel good when one does and when it is appropriate. Employees need to be mindful of stretching themselves too thin.

And more good news? The concepts mentioned may apply to personal lives as well; for instance, cross-train

laundry duties and share a communal calendar at home. (Don’t we hope the “no” can apply at home too!)

While this ROWE concept may not be possible for all, with rigid situations, there can be flexibility, and that is exactly what Amy McPherson indicated. When possible, a physical activity around the lunch hour may be helpful, such as a simple walk. If that is not possible, McPherson recommended at least some form of regular physical exercise is helpful.

As many work conferences occur, or other traveling opportunities arise, take advantage of the situation. Can one work and play at the same time? She mentioned her husband taking a trip for work to Paris, and she thought “I need to figure out how I can go!” It is one of the pleasures of being able to have a remote office; have tools available to go anywhere.

She also added that attendees need to feel allowed to be bored. Unplugging can provide the best outlet to give the brain some much-needed rest. And ultimately, “How you feel is caught up in other things; for instance, the philosophy ‘feel right, eat right.’ If I’m feeling good, I’ll make better choices.”

Jonathan Schultz was also seeking flexibility adjustments in a traditional workday. Schultz started to question whether everyone needs to have the 8:00 to 5:00 day? And does everyone need to be at work at the same time? So he went behind the scenes and started working with staff to slowly shift schedules around to better fit their needs. For instance, one staff person may need to work 7:00–3:00 in order to pick up children from school at 3:30. But that does not mean everyone should. A fellow staffer might need a different timeframe for a completely different reason, and that is acceptable. He wanted to accommodate schedules, since in turn, no person’s life is the same, so when possible, different timetables may permit.

Once implemented, the employee benefits were rewarding: greater work coverage as a whole and a happier, healthier staff. Similar to Gunn’s presentation, he added that before a new change takes place, promoting cross-training, keeping up communication, embracing technology, and setting expectations were some of the recommendations to tackle first.

Today, can folks say, “I don’t live to work” (as Gunn also mentioned in her piece)? One would hope the takeaways from Melnyk’s talk and the “Work-Life Balance” session give this question some thought...and some answers! Let’s see what the rest of 2019 will look like: there is still time.

## References and Links

1. Ressler C, Thompson J. *Why Work Sucks and How to Fix It*. New York, NY: Penguin Group; 2008.