

## LIFE LESSONS



John Costello

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## Dilemma

"MY LIFE seems to be falling apart. My husband and I both work full-time and our two-year-old is in a local creche. Since returning to work after maternity leave things have become unbearable.

"My job is highly stressful and I find it difficult to switch off. When I arrive home in the evenings to my son and my husband I am irritable and overly tired. While mentally I feel constantly drained, I also suffer frequently from neck and back pain, which adds to my feeling of depression.

"My husband is loving and understanding, but our relationship has suffered. Our sex life is now virtually non-existent, and I feel we are growing apart. I also feel guilty about not being there for my baby.

"I leave for work at 7am and generally don't get home until after 7pm, so I rarely have quality time with my family. I work very hard and have developed a strong career, but once I leave the office I feel the rest of my life is out of control. When I see how happy some of my friends and other couples I know are, I always wonder where it all has gone wrong.

"I find it difficult to discuss my feelings as I am terrified of being seen as a failure. Please help, I feel I have no one else to turn to."

## Expert

As a qualified life coach and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) practitioner, Ellen Shilling (right) works with individuals to combat stress in their lives and realise their potential. She runs her own practice in Blackrock, Co Dublin and can be contact via [www.ellenshilling.com](http://www.ellenshilling.com).



"My heart goes out to you. It sounds like you're very stressed, and I can understand why. Society tells us that we must 'have it all', but sometimes I don't believe that even superwoman could keep up!

"What I'd suggest is, when you feel ready, take out a piece of paper and a pen and ask yourself: 'What is most important to me right now?' Write down your answer and allow yourself complete honesty. Remember, there are no 'shoulds' or 'must do's' - it's your life. Your answer is right and true for you.

"Some suggestions are: Love, success, intimacy, security, passion, career, health, family, etc. These are called 'values' and they are so fundamentally part of us that when we live against them, we feel frustrated, empty, irritable and sometimes, depressed. Make a list of the five most important values for your life right now.

# How do I balance work with my busy home life?

The key to happiness is to live in accordance with your values.

"For example, if your most important values are home and family life, then perhaps you could work part-time, or maybe you could have a chat with your boss to see what options are available to you.

"If your values are career, learning and achieving, maybe it's time to look at your job and see where you can cut back on the stress.

"Once you have the end goal in sight, ask yourself what the first step is that you can take to get you there.

"It is also a great idea to place your list of values somewhere that you will see them every day. In this way, you are reminded of what is most important to you, so for any decisions that you need to make, you can ask yourself, 'is this bringing me closer, or further away, to my values?'"

"Could you discuss your findings with your partner? Perhaps he could do the same exercise and see if you're both 'on the same page', as it

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were. Discuss each value and why it's important to each of you. This would go a great way towards rebuilding your relationship.

"Employing the services of a good coach or a therapist could really help you. I know you are reluctant to go down this route, but it might just be the easier path. You don't have to do it all, and you don't have to do it alone, either."

## Expert

Karen Belshaw (right) is VHI Healthcare's stress expert. She holds an honours degree in psychology and is a member of the Psychological Society of Ireland. She trained additionally at the Stress Institute of Ireland, and is a founder/director of Stress Management Ireland. Further articles by Karen Belshaw can be found on [www.vhi.ie](http://www.vhi.ie).



"When it comes to a work-life balance, you seem to have a lot of 'work', not enough 'life' and very little 'balance'!

"You say you are not happy, so you need to change something in your daily routine. I would suggest more personal and quality time with the people that mean most to you.

"When you have children and a family, your situations change. It is imperative that you change with them. You need to adapt to your new role as wife and mother as well as career woman. It is possible to be 'all things' but only if you prioritise strictly and make choices.

"It appears that you are giving all to work and there is nothing left for your baby, your husband,

or yourself.

"Time management: sit down and write a list of your priorities and values in life. Then write out a typical daily routine. Now compare the two lists and see if anything corresponds. It takes a bit of practical time management to indicate just where your time goes, but more importantly, to indicate whether you are fulfilling what you consider a priority in your life.

"Switch off: the ability to switch off from work is a learned behaviour.

Give yourself a mental signal, such as 'Let it go. . . work is over for today' and drop that thought into your head whenever you find work thoughts intruding on family life. Also, give yourself a physical signal, such as changing shoes or clothes when you get home, to show the transition from work to life.

"Exercise: make time in your daily schedule for 20 minutes' exercise. It can be walking (park your car further away from trains, buses, etc and walk the extra distance); do yoga at home with a video; swim at weekends with the family; meditate for 10 minutes every morning. There's a wide range of simple exercises - the choice is yours.

"Control negative thoughts: stop negative thoughts about yourself or inadequate behaviour as a mother. Negative thoughts don't achieve anything; they will only emphasize your depressed feelings and trigger the stress response. A simple method of controlling thoughts is to catch yourself uttering the negative and replace it with a prepared positive thought. You need to remember why you are doing this when it occurs. The more you practise, the easier it becomes."

**5 THINGS EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT THIS WEEK**

With CLAIRE COUGHLAN

**1 Brian Kearney's conviction:** The trial of the Dublin man and his subsequent conviction for murdering his wife, Siobhan, dominated headlines and front pages in recent weeks.

He has started serving his life sentence at Wheatfield prison.



LIFE SENTENCE: Kearney

**2 In high places:** The controversy surrounding

her book, *The High Society*, has only just died down, but that hasn't stopped Justine Delaney Wilson's sensational expose of cocaine use in Ireland getting shortlisted for an Irish Book Award in the non-fiction category.

**3 Drink laws reviewed:** Bertie has promised new laws to deal with alcohol-related violence



NOMINEE: Delaney Wilson